

THE  
JESUS OF THE GOSPELS  
AND THE  
INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

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VERBATIM REPORT OF THE

TWO NIGHTS' DEBATE

BETWEEN THE

REV. A. HATCHARD & ANNIE BESANT

*At the Hall of Science, 142, Old Street, on Wednesdays,  
November 25th and December 1st, 1880.*



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# FIRST NIGHT.

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## SUBJECT:—

*“That the Jesus of the Gospels is a Historical Character.”*

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### MR. TURPIN IN THE CHAIR.

THE CHAIRMAN in opening the proceedings stated that he had expected his friend, Mr. Cowper, would have taken the chair that evening, and that Mr. Cowper not being able to be present another gentleman had been named; but he also was unable to preside, so that the lot had fallen upon him. It was, however, not the first time he had taken the chair in the Hall of Science, but he was pleased to see that since he last occupied that post there, a change had taken place in the *materialism* of the hall, and he hoped that in course of time a change might also be effected in the *spiritualism* of the hall likewise. He hoped that they would allow him to sit still, by listening quietly and without interruption to both the speakers in the ensuing debate. The Rev. A. Hatchard was to contend that the Jesus of the Gospels was a historical character, and Mrs. Besant would contend that he could not occupy that position. The order of the debate would be as follows:—The Rev. A. Hatchard would open in the affirmative, occupying half an hour; Mrs. Besant would then follow in the negative, occupying another half hour. There would then be four speeches of a quarter of an hour each, two from each speaker; and then Mr. Hatchard would close the debate with another speech of a quarter of an hour's duration. He concluded by asking for a fair hearing for both sides of the argument, which, he said, was better for the subject, better for the debaters, and better for the audience; and he trusted that the dignity and character of the disputants and of the audience would be such that that debate might be looked back upon in the future as a model debate. He then called upon the Rev. A. Hatchard to open in the affirmative.

The Rev. A. HATCHARD, who was greeted with applause, then rose and said :—Mr. Chairman, Mr. Bradlaugh, Ladies, and Gentlemen : I stand before you here this evening to prove that the Jesus of the Gospels is a historical character. Now I can well understand that some persons may think that a superfluous task in the present day, but as there are those on the present platform who question it it may be necessary for me to go through some of the evidence by which we prove this matter. But as it is utterly impossible to make a jump in the mind from now to more than 1800 years ago, so to speak, I do not intend to ask you to make what I call a “ jump ” from now to the time when Christ was born. I intend to take you back by what is called the bridge of history—the bridge of history over the gulf of time. Now here is an ordinary English copy of the Scriptures. I put that in the hands of a man, and he looks at it and examines it. After this examination he says: “ I see here an account of an extraordinary character, but how do I know that this is a true account; and how do I know that these books really come down from the time you say they come down from?” Now you know very well what the authorised English Bible is, and you find that the same Bibles are in the hands of Christian sects all over the world, for between the Roman Catholic Bible and the English Protestant Bible there is really no difference. Here we have the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, and a large number of bodies of Dissenters—of Independents, Baptists, Wesleyans, and many other sects or parties who all accept the same book. Well, now you see that this is the fact that the Christian world receives that book to-day. We may make a jump right back from now certainly to the time of Mahomet, who believed in the historical existence of Jesus, and we may make another jump backward to the fourth century. Now you may ask me how do I prove that the Bible was not altered during those centuries, and my answer is that the Bible we have is the same as the book was at the invention of printing, as you may see by the Bibles which are now in the British Museum. Now you are well aware that it is something like 400 or 450 years since printing first came into use, and we may jump back over that period without any difficulty. Now, during the age of manuscripts, we can go back without any difficulty



at all to the year 325, where you see the council of Nice. Through that period, the age of manuscripts, what guarantee had we that these manuscripts were not altered? Simply this. These manuscripts, in various languages, were scattered about all over Europe, over a good part of Asia, over the North of Africa; they were in the hands of conflicting sects and parties, so that no one could alter them in the slightest degree. It would be impossible to interpolate the story of Jesus of Nazareth without its being discovered. Now, you see from these diagrams that I have taken you back to this period here (pointing to the diagram fixed on the platform). I have taken you over the easiest period. We now come to the time of Constantine, who was the first Roman Emperor who proclaimed himself a Christian. (Laughter.) I am not going to discuss the character of Constantine. I daresay those of you who have paid any attention to this matter know that in the time of Constantine there was a great dispute between the Arians and the orthodox party, and I suppose you are well aware that Athanasius was the person who maintained orthodox, and that Arius was a man who maintained unorthodox Christianity. Now, Eusebius really is the man who is said to have presented to the Council of Nice the Nicene Creed, and, although some of you are Freethinkers, you have been in the Church of England, and I venture to say that a large number of you have been baptised in the Church of England. Consequently, you know the creed of the Church of England which I refer to when I speak of the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed is said to have been presented to the Council of Nice by Eusebius. I stand here to tell you that from the work of Eusebius we receive a very important part of the evidence respecting the Christian Church, that is, as regards its early history. It has been disputed by thinkers whether Eusebius is a truthful historian; but I put him before you to-night as a truthful historian. I stand here boldly to put Eusebius before you as substantially a truthful historian. As to what is said in Taylor's "Diegesis" and other similar works, I do not trouble myself to answer them, for I maintain that the "Diegesis" is an utterly unreliable book, and that its quotations are inaccurate. I could give you plenty of instances to show that Taylor is quite unreliable; and I make nothing at all of the

remarks of such writers as Taylor. We have the Christian faith promulgated and pronounced in that Nicene Creed that we read every Sunday in the Communion Service of the Church of England. I have got back now to the time of Athanasius, Arius, Eusebius, and of Constantine, when Christianity was proclaimed as the religion of the Roman Empire, and when, as you know well, it became allied with the State. In this fourth century I find the same Christian Creed maintained by those writers whose names I have placed here (pointing to the diagrams), viz., Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, and Basil. Here, then, are these writers belonging to the fourth century, by whom the Christian faith is promulgated and taught as it is put forward in the Four Gospels and in the writings of St. Paul: we find it substantially and practically the same as in those writers whom I have mentioned to you as belonging to the fourth century. I now go back into the third century. I have here the name of Tertullian, who, as you are well aware, was one of the greatest writers of the Christian Church and Cyprian, Minucius Felix, who was a Latin writer, and who wrote what would now be called an "Apology for Christianity." I next come to Origen, who was one of the greatest writers of the Church, against whose name you will see I have placed the dates 184 to 253. Now this Origen was in many respects one of the most eminent writers the Church has produced, according to my own opinion respecting him and his teachings: but he teaches clearly the same Christian faith as we have. We now come to Clement of Alexandria, who was a predecessor of Origen, and we get to Pantænus. It would take me too long to enter into the details, but it is perfectly clear that Pantænus was a Christian teacher. We have only some fragments of his writings preserved to us. He is said to have been a great traveller into the East, and discoverer of a MS. containing an account of the gospel. He is one who is put forward by the Christian thinkers as a link in the chain of historical evidence. I now come to what are called the so-called Apostolic Constitutions. I do not put them before you as the work of the Apostles, but they have come down to us by that name. Mrs. Besant will lose her time in attacking me upon these—(laughter)—don't laugh until you have heard what I have to say. I put them before you as occurring in the third century, simply as a

record of Church practices and customs that were popular in the third century. Coming now to the second century, we find an eminent man named Polycarp first mentioned. He, also, was a professor of the Christian faith, and is said to have suffered martyrdom. Tertullian, you will observe, is mentioned in the second century as well as the third century, because he reaches over a part of both of them. I have next the name of Iræneus, who was an eminent Christian of the second century—Iræneus, who also was an eminent believer of the Christian faith. We now come to the *crux* of the whole thing. When we get here, then begins what freethinkers call *the difficulty*. I present to you Justin Martyr. Justin Martyr is really a most important man in the history of the Christian Church, and also in the record of the history of the Christian faith. He was a very popular Christian in his day, and he presented one Apology (so called) for the Christian faith to the Roman Emperor. Of course there are two Apologies, which are known to the world under his name. I stand here to maintain one. I could maintain the two. I maintain the first one. What does he tell us with respect to the Christian faith? He tells us the same thing as we have in the Four Gospels in the present day. I will give you one or two of Justin's quotations. It has been arranged that the quotations shall be printed from the books, so that there will be no mistake whatever about what is read. I give you a quotation from his first Apology, which runs thus: "At the same time an angel was sent to the same virgin, saying, 'Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb by the Holy Ghost, and thou shalt bring forth a son, and He shall be called the Son of the Highest, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins;' *as they have taught* who have written the history of all things concerning our Savior, Jesus Christ." Another quotation from the same: "For the apostles in those memorials which are written by them, *which are called Gospels*, thus delivered it, 'that Jesus taking bread, blessing it, commanded them to say, Do this in remembrance of me; this is my body; and taking the cup in like manner and giving thanks, to say, This is my blood'"—I need not tell you that that refers to what is called the institution of the Lord's Supper; "For *in the Memoirs* which I say were composed by the apostles, and

those who became their followers, it is written, that 'His sweat fell like drops of blood, while he prayed and said, If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.' In giving up the ghost on the cross, He said, 'Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit,' as *also I learned from the Memoirs*" ["Exeter Hall Lectures," pp. 140, 141]. I have given you now one, two, three quotations from Justin Martyr's Apology. I stand here to tell you most distinctly that the Christian faith, as taught by Justin Martyr in his first Apology, is practically and really the same as what we have in the Four Gospels which exist at the present time. Now, I know that some person may say that it is not quite the exact words, the same as we have them to-day; but I say, What of that? I present you with a short notice from a well-known book, which I got with considerable difficulty. It is an old copy; it is called "Introductory Lectures to the Study of the Books of the New Testament," by John David Michaelis, published by Tonson, in the Strand, 1761. The reason I quote from this is simply this. I could have brought you a number of the modern writers in Germany, but free-thinkers are very fond of quoting from this book—so I was told. I believe it to be a substantially good account of the Gospels. These accounts, "like other ancient writers, they quote merely from memory, and therefore inaccurately." You know that was not an age of printing, but was an age when they had only MS. rolls on which the Scriptures were written; and it was a custom to quote from memory, and, therefore, not so verbally as we should do in the present day with the carefully printed book lying before us. I say that the Four Gospels, as we have them to-day, is substantially what Justin Martyr teaches us here in the second century. Two other confirmatory evidences. All of you present, I suppose, have read what is called the letter of Pliny Junior, or Secundus, to the Emperor Trajan with respect to the treatment of the Christians. If you want outside testimony to the testimony of the Christian sects or societies, and if you want a record as to their practices you have the reference most clearly and unmistakably in the letter of Pliny. He records in the public letter to Trajan, which, of course, was well-known at the time—the existence of this people, who hold substantially the same Christian belief which we hold to-day. I get back now to

another heathen writer, Suetonius, who certainly does make distinct allusion to the Christians. He makes an allusion to the Christians, but then again we have here the testimony of Ignatius. This Ignatius is a great name in the early Church. I put Ignatius before you as really one of the Christian writers who bore witness in his day and generation for the Christian faith. Clement, of Rome, comes next, I place him before you to-night boldly—boldly I place him before you as a Christian writer who is well-known, and who bore testimony in the first century to the same facts as we have in the present day. Next to Clement comes Hermas, who wrote what we call “The Shepherd.” Under the head Apostolic writers, or writers in their days, we get first of all St. John, who lived according to the Christian Church until the end of the first century. I place before you the testimony of Tacitus, recorded by the sceptical historian, Gibbon—I place before you Tacitus as a witness to the truth substantially of the Christian faith. I also place before you the testimony of Josephus. (Oh!) I know all that Freethinkers say with respect to Josephus, and I may be told that he was a Jew, that he would never have written the passage which, I dare say, you all know, but I say that Josephus seems to be something of the Freethinker himself, and I place him before you as one who just mentioned and alluded to the fact of the Christian Church or sect. I next pass to St. Peter and St. Paul, and I defy all the Freethinkers in Europe to break down the testimony of the Apostle Paul contained in these four epistles—the Epistle to the Romans, the two to the Corinthians, and the Epistle to the Galatians. Even the Freethinkers of Germany have allowed that these are the works of the Apostle Paul. If I understand rightly, Mrs. Besant does not believe in a great first cause and moral ruler of this world. I do. I am not ashamed to say it. To me a universe that has always been, human beings whose life is simply confined to this world and who have no souls are simply ridiculous and monstrous. (Laughter and Applause.) I stand here before the Freethinkers in England, and I am not ashamed to stand upon this platform and say that I believe in a great first cause, a great moral ruler of the universe, whom I believe exercises a superintending providence over all things. (Applause.) The testimony of St.

Paul proves indisputably that Jesus of Nazareth was a historical character, an extraordinary character, and I say a divine character or person. Let me remind you that there can be no dispute that St. Paul was present at Rome in the time of Nero. I find in the time of St. Paul, or about that time, Claudius Cæsar ordered the Jews out of Rome, on account of a disturbance—

The CHAIRMAN: Time.

Mr. Hatchard sat down amid loud applause.

Mrs. BESANT then rose, and when the loud and continued applause with which she was welcomed had subsided, said: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Hatchard, and friends, I am glad that in dealing with a question so important as the present I have the pleasure of meeting one who deals fairly and honestly with the subject; so that if in this debate no satisfactory result comes to the audience it at least will not be the fault of the Christian disputant who opposes me. A very large part of Mr. Hatchard's speech I shall not touch because I do not think that I need in any fashion deal with it. I allude to what he has told you with respect to the fourth century and the time after it. The difficulty of Mr. Hatchard is not to prove that Christ was believed to be a historical personage after the fourth century, but to bridge over the years between A.D. 1 and A.D. 300. I conceive that if he can bridge over that, then my position would be a difficult one to maintain. I admit that from the time of the Council of Nice the Christian Churches were strong and spreading, and that *after* that period Christ was recognised through a large part of the civilised world. But you cannot carry the history of Christ and the history of the Gospels over that terrible chasm of three centuries after the birth of Christ. If even you can get so far as A.D. 200 you have practically knocked away the supports on which the Free-thought platform stands. I quite agree that we are not here to discuss the character of the Emperor Constantine, nor even of the Fathers. We have to deal with the reliability of the views of the Christian Fathers: we have nothing in the world to say to their character. They may have been very good, as very bad: we deal with them as witnesses of the truth or falsity of the particular Christian teaching with which we are concerned. The subject for debate is "That the Jesus of the Gospels is a historical person," and

clearly the character of Constantine cannot make the historical character of Jesus either more clear or less accurate than my opponent can show it to be. I am obliged to dissent from the view to which my opponent has given utterance, viz., that exactly the same Bible is in the hands of both Protestant and Catholic. The Douay Bible differs in many respects from the Bible received in Protestant Churches; and nothing is more common than for a Roman Catholic to warn his hearers on the peril of their souls not to read the Protestant Bible, while on the other hand the Protestant cautions his followers that the Douay version of the Scriptures is misleading and therefore not to be received. Carrying back the same Bible through the era of printing to the era of MSS., and going back as far as we can, we find that no one pretends that there are any MSS. in existence earlier than those of the fourth century, so that we cannot trace back our MSS. over that critical period of which I spoke. But taking the MSS. which are in existence and comparing them together we find that they are not all alike, and the more we compare one with another the more discrepancies do we find. We have it on the authority of Dr. Angus that there are no less than 100,000 different readings in these MSS. If there were but one set of MSS., so to speak, there surely would be no need for the years that the translators have been spending on their labor of revising the New Testament. If there is one received set of MSS. there would be no difficulty at all. Then again I come to the Arians and the Catholics; but I do not think I need dwell on them, because the Arians admitted the historical character of the Jesus of the Gospels as much as the Catholics. It has been urged by my opponent that the creed known as the Nicene Creed, which was adopted by the Council of Nice in the year 325, and which we are told substantially embodies the Christian teaching of that period, as well as of the present day, is the same creed as the one we now call by that name; but I would remind Mr. Hatchard that the last part of that creed was not adopted at Nicœa, nor presented by Eusebius, but that it was added at the Council of Constantinople, and was not consequently in use until many years after the time at which he alleges the creed was adopted and used as a whole. I now come to Eusebius; and you will observe that I am taking

these points which have been raised by my opponent, one by one, before I grapple with the real difficulty. The work of Eusebius is put forward as thoroughly reliable. I would remind my opponent that Eusebius himself says that he chose the materials for his history for edification rather than for accuracy, and that is not a promising beginning for a historian, as you will all allow. But if Eusebius is to be relied on, the letter of Jesus to Agbarus is thoroughly authentic, for that is given with a particularity far greater than is his general wont. We have now come to Justin and the earlier Fathers; and here, with your permission, instead of following step by step the line which my opponent has taken, I will begin at the other end, and work up to these Apostolic Fathers on whom my opponent seems so much to rely. I shall serve the cause, I believe, of Free-thought better not by simply making isolated objections to the views of Mr. Hatchard, but by showing also the heretical view which we hold. I propose, therefore, to try to place before you my own views as to the Jesus of the Gospels. I shall try to give a coherent account of the heretical view, and I shall urge that it is more in accordance with the facts of history, human experience, scientific thought and common sense to take the heretical view which we take, than to accept the view that the Jesus of the Gospels is a historical character. We are agreed apparently that the Jesus of the Gospels is a supernatural character. His birth of a virgin, the marvels surrounding his infancy, his wonderful baptism, his temptation by the devil, his miracles of healing, of destruction and of self-defence, his foreknowledge of his own death, his transfiguration, the mysterious darkness surrounding his cross, his resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven; if you take all these, it is impossible to deny that his life is a supernatural and miraculous one from beginning to end. I do not say that you cannot remove all these miraculous and wonderful surroundings, and still leave, untouched, the simple Jew who went about as a teacher of the people; but if you once remove the miraculous, you then have no longer the Jesus of the Gospels. Clearly, the supernatural is the appropriate frame-work for the incarnation of Deity; the miraculous is the proper paraphernalia of divine royalty. There may have been a Jesus, then, who led a simple human life; but



I have to deal simply with the Jesus of the Gospels, and I shall endeavor to show how I conceive that various myths floating about became crystallised around the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. I cannot admit the supernatural; I cannot admit the miraculous; and, therefore, the very assertion that the Jesus of the Gospels is a miraculous and supernatural character is a great stumbling block at the outset. There are so many incarnate Gods in human history, and they all present the same birthmarks. They are always born at such a remote period, or at some such out-of-the-way place, that it is practically impossible to subject their claims to any kind of scientific investigation. Their births are always surrounded with prodigies; they always work miracles when they grow up; there is always something mysterious in their deaths; they always ascend triumphant at the last; these are the great outline marks of all the incarnate Deities which our world has known; and I allege that Jesus is one of these mythic characters, that the principal features of his life are possessed by him in common with thousands of rivals, and that he cannot, in any fashion, be distinguished from them. The essence of the spirit in which science meets the record of miracles is the spirit of Hume, that it is much more likely that men should have been deceived than that our whole experience of nature should have been contradicted. "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. . . . There must, therefore, be an uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as an uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full *proof*, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior. . . . Upon the whole, then, it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof; and that, even supposing it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof; derived from the very nature of the fact, which it would endeavor to establish. It is experience only which

gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but substract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion, either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here explained, this substraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion" ["Essay on Miracles," ed. 1770, pp. 160, 161, 178]. (Applause.) I may say that I at once accept that position of Hume. You all act upon that belief in your daily life, although you don't all act so in regard to the Gospels. We do not trouble ourselves to investigate modern miracles. Even those who accept and believe in the miracles of the Gospels pooh pooh modern ones, and pass them by with contempt. We have so often in our experience found people to be mistaken. We have so often found that testimony breaks down owing to enthusiasm, love, fear, ignorance, inaccuracy of perception or of memory. But we do not find the same changeability in the course of nature. We have not had experience of constant failures in the relation of natural causes to natural effects; and we reject the miraculous because it is contrary to the facts of the world as we know them. We believe that witnesses, however honest, are more likely to have been deceived than that the order of nature should have been violated. (Applause.) We have to deal clearly with this point. If we are to accept miracles, the evidence must be overwhelming in its strength. But when we turn to examine it we find it is lamentably weak—marvellously meagre. Two principal sources of information present themselves. First, we have what is sometimes curiously denominated profane history, but which I will call secular history; and, secondly, we have sacred history, divine history, and to that I will add the testimony of those fathers of the Church on whom my antagonist so much relies. With regard to the outside history—from Pagan writers—I will not give you my own opinion, but I will give you the opinion of Gibbon, and simply allow you to judge whether the life of Christ as it is recorded in the

Gospels could have taken place with so little notice; and with respect to the passage from Josephus and others which my opponent has quoted to you I allege, and shall prove, that they will not bear the slightest investigation. The evidence of the Christian fathers which has been adduced would not be accepted, I will not say in one of our High Courts of Justice, but even in a County Court. Gibbon asks: "But how shall we excuse the supine inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world, to those evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses? During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first disciples, the doctrine which they preached was confirmed by innumerable prodigies. The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, daemons were expelled, and the laws of Nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the Church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world. Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman empire, was involved in a prater-natural darkness for three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history. It happened during the lifetime of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who must have experienced the immediate effects, or received the earliest intelligence of the prodigy. Each of these philosophers, in a laborious work, has recorded all the great phenomena of Nature, earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses, which his indefatigable curiosity could collect. Both the one and the other have omitted to mention the greatest phenomenon to which the mortal eye has been witness since the creation of the globe" ["Decline and Fall," Ed. 1808, pp. 178, 179]. (Applause.) Tacitus is a Pagan writer relied upon by my opponent. Tacitus tells us nothing of the miracles. He tells us only that Christ was put to death as a criminal under Pontius Pilate, but the fact that he was so put to death does not prove the miracles. Allow that this phrase of Tacitus is authentic—even then the passage is worthless from the point of view of my opponent. It simply

proves that one Christ was put to death in Judea: it proves nothing as to the supernatural and miraculous Jesus of the Gospels. But I may at once say to you that so far from this testimony of Tacitus being unchallenged, it is very seriously challenged. All the MSS. we possess come down from one copy which belonged to Johannes de Spire in A.D. 1468, and taking the view that this passage may have been inserted, as it is evident that it easily could have been, we find as a strong confirmatory fact that Eusebius is the first to quote it; none of the earlier Fathers quoted it at all, so that you cannot find a trace of it before the fourth century.\* We now come to Suetonius. What was it that Suetonius said? He tells us that forty years after Christ's death—no, about A.D. 40—the Jews rioted in Rome and one Chrestus was their leader. If, therefore, this passage from Suetonius be applied to the Christ of the Gospels, then, some years after he had been put to death in Judea, had risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, he is found leading the Jews to insurrection in Rome, and this does not appear to me to be any sort of evidence for his life in Judea. (Applause and laughter.) But there is a very curious remark of the Emperor Adrian which is not generally quoted by Christian writers, so I will give it now: the Emperor wrote from Egypt that the “worshippers of Serapis are Christians, and those are consecrated to the God Serapis who, I find, call themselves the bishops of Christ.” This interesting fact is not dwelt upon by Christian apologists. But the silence of Pagan writers is well summed up for me by a Christian writer. The Rev. Dr. Giles, beneficed clergyman of the Church of England, gives us, in this work [“Christian Records”], exactly the points which I have been putting before you. He says: “Though the remains of Grecian and Latin profane literature which belong to the first and second centuries of our era are enough to form a library of themselves, they contain no allusion to the New Testament. . . . The Latin writers, who lived between the time of Christ's crucifixion and the year A.D. 200, are Seneca, Lucan, Suetonius, Tacitus, Persius, Juvenal, Martial, Pliny the Elder, Silius Italicus, Statius,

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\* Eusebius does not mention Tacitus, and the statement is a slip, occurring in the rapidity of debate. [A. B.]

Quintilian, and Pliny the Younger, besides numerous others of inferior note. The greater number of these make mention of the Jews, but not of the Christians. In fact, Suetonius, Tacitus, and the younger Pliny, are the only Roman writers who mention the Christian religion or its founder ('Christian Records,' by Rev. Dr. Giles, p. 36). So much for the arguments regarding Christ which are found in Pagan and Roman writers. I shall have to deal now with the others. Let me say at once that I do not challenge the existence of persons called Christians; on the contrary, I admit that they existed—a long time before Christ was born. (Laughter.) I think they existed long before the birth of Christ into the world, and I may here again remark that no argument brought forward to prove the existence of Christians can have the slightest weight in deciding the question at issue. The point between us is not the existence of Christians, but the historical character of the Jesus of the New Testament. I now come to the passage in Josephus. Mr. Hatchard says that he alleges that this passage was really written by the person whose name it bears; I answer that it is impossible to bring forward the name of one man of note of the present day who accepts it as genuine. It is now almost universally given up, and the evidence of its interpolation is very clear. Take the passage: "Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day" ["Antiquities of the Jews," book xviii., ch. iii., sect. 3]. I will now tell you why I do not believe the passage to be true. The Jesus of the Gospels in the first place did not draw many of the Jews unto him; on the contrary, he drew extremely few, and was remarkably unsuccessful as a teacher. Then he did not draw many of the Gentiles; on the con-

trary, he alleged, according to the Gospels, that he was not sent save to the lost sheep of the house of Israel; so that you find Josephus distinctly in contradiction with the book he is called to prove. Then, again, it is stated he was the Christ, but how was it possible for Josephus here, a Jew, in his own book to affirm that which his own opinion and religion taught him most strongly to deny? For a man who was not a Christian, but a Jew—who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah, to make this statement in his own book, was practically to call himself “hypocrite,” and to stand before the world a self-convicted hypocrite out of his own mouth.

Mrs. Besant’s time having expired she sat down amid great applause.

MR. HATCHARD: Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, Mrs. Besant, in her opening remarks, referred to Dr. Angus, and to the fact that he was one of the present company of revisers of the New Testament, and also to the fact that there are a large number of various readings of the New Testament in existence. I am pleased beyond measure, because I lived with Dr. Angus for four years. I know him well, and I know him for a thoroughly trustworthy scholar. Now, Dr. Angus has repeated over and over again in public that all these various readings, in what are called the MSS. of the New Testament, do not alter a single doctrine of Christianity, and do not alter a single important fact in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. I have here Dr. Angus’s “Bible Handbook,” and if Mrs. Besant has not got this book, I will present her with a copy at the end of this debate. (Laughter.) Here is the book, and Dr. Angus goes very elaborately into the question of those various MSS., and these various readings. Now, Mrs. Besant told you that we had no MSS. in existence older than the fourth century. I suppose that is the fact. But then I say this: Will Mrs. Besant produce to me the original MS. or MSS. of anything—say of any classical work? No! There is no such thing in the world, and it is perfectly well known that there is not a single case where we possess the original MS. or MSS. of any work of antiquity. We have only a few MSS.—certainly three—which are said to be the oldest MSS. of the New Testament in existence. These old MSS. which we have tell us precisely and substantially the same

story, and the same tale of Jesus of Nazareth. Reference has been made to the difference which exists between the Douay Bible of the Roman Catholics and the authorised version of the Protestant, but I fail to discover any new or any different facts related in the Douay Bible which do not also find their place in the Bible which the Protestant uses. Why, at one time I acted as a military chaplain, and I have by me now a small Testament which was published by authority, and bearing the imprimatur of the late Cardinal of Westminster (not the present one); and in that book I read the very same facts as I read in the Protestant Bible. The Romish Church published this Testament by authority, and they were not simply content with putting at the top of each Gospel the name of the author which appears at its head in the Protestant Bible, but also the date and circumstances under which it was supposed to be written. We have, therefore, as I have already stated, only a few old MSS., but we have a vast number of a later date. A word about the different readings, and the supposed difference which they make. I hold in my hand what I consider an important little book. It is the New Testament of Tauchnitz, of Germany. If you want to know about what the various readings are, and if you cannot read the Greek Testament, this book (published by the firm of Baron Tauchnitz) will give you the various readings at the bottom of each page in English. I suppose you know that these books in Germany are published by a firm which has gained a good amount of celebrity, whose name I have mentioned. This is the thousandth volume. They thought they would publish the New Testament, and actually here, in this little book, they publish the New Testament, the authorised version, with all the various readings here in English underneath. Was the firm of Tauchnitz, or was Tischendorf himself, afraid to let the public know about these various readings? Certainly not. As you have heard, there is a body of revisers who are sitting at Westminster. They are engaged in revising the Bible, but I challenge Mrs. Besant to prove that they will alter it in any important particular or any Christian doctrine. Here is Scrivener's Greek Testament, in which are condensed all the various readings which are known. This book is one which is considered a very good authority, and it is one which theological

students are made to read. Here, then, is Scrivener's Greek Testament; here is Tischendorf's English edition of it; prove to me, from these books, that there is any difference between this and the ordinary authorised version. Mrs. Besant has spoken to you at some length upon the subject of miracles, and alleges the impossibility of a single miracle ever having taken place. Now, I beg of all of you here to-night, if you have never read the volume of Bampton Lectures, by Dr. Mozley ["Lectures on Miracles"], to do so at once. This volume I was *ordered* to read by the Bishop of Manchester, and I thank his Lordship for having ordered me to read it. I will tell you why. I am not ignorant of Christian science. I will meet any Freethinker on this platform on philosophy or science if he dares to come. (Laughter, and a voice, "Modesty.") I say, I learn from the examples of Freethinkers, whom I have yet to learn are very modest themselves. You cannot charge me with knowing nothing about physical science. I say that science has no contradictions whatever of the miracles which are recorded in the New Testament. (Laughter.) I tell you that if you like to take the pains, which I do not believe you Freethinkers will do. . . . ("Question.") If you interrupt me I sit down that minute. (Applause.) I am no paid lecturer of the Christian Evidence Society; I come here entirely upon an independent basis. (Applause.) I tell you that this volume of Bampton Lectures goes elaborately into the question about law. I cannot, in my limited time here to-night, read a passage from this book. I bring it under your notice; but I will read a passage from John Stuart Mill. I suppose all of you know something about him. Now, in his book on "Logic," which I take it that you all know, second volume, and 159th page he says—"But in order that any alleged fact should be contradictory to a law of causation, the allegation must be, not simply that the cause existed without being followed by the effect, for that would be no uncommon occurrence; but that this happened in the absence of any adequate counteracting cause. Now in the case of an alleged miracle, the assertion is the exact opposite of this. It is, that the effect was defeated, not in the absence, but in consequence of a counteracting cause, namely, a direct interposition of an act of the will of some Being, who has power over nature; and in particular of a



Being, whose will being assumed to have endowed all the causes with the powers by which they produce their effects, may well be supposed able to counteract them. A miracle (as was justly remarked by Brown) is no contradiction to the law of cause and effect; it is a new effect, supposed to be produced by the introduction of a new cause. Of the adequacy of that cause, if present, there can be no doubt; and the only antecedent improbability which can be ascribed to the miracle, is the improbability that any such cause existed" ("Exeter Hall Lectures"). (Applause.) Don't cheer too soon. The thing simply means this, that you must deny the existence of a God to deny logically the possibility of a miracle. If I am not mistaken, Paley says the same words; and I think that Mill must have seen it in Paley. I give you John Stuart Mill, not that John Stuart Mill is any great prophet with me, although I have a certain admiration for the man. (Applause.)

MRS. BESANT: There are one or two points which have been alluded to by my opponent in reply to my previous speech, which I will deal with before resuming my criticism on Josephus. The first of these is that of the 100,000 readings which I mentioned—the existence of which is not even challenged—none of them affect any important doctrine in the Bible. I will leave you to judge of the accuracy of that, after I have adduced one or two facts. In the First Epistle of John, chap. v., verse 7, we read: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." Now, that is one of the passages which you do not find in the older MSS.: it is the solitary assertion of the Trinity to be found in the Bible. Surely the Trinity is important. Take next the doctrine of Eternal Punishment. That is a doctrine about which the new reading of the Bible will probably give us very different views to those now held. Some of you may have read a pitiful letter, which appeared in the *Athenæum* a short time back, in which the writer asked whether the rumor which had reached him was true, viz., that the Revisors of the New Testament were going to translate a well-known passage in the Lord's Prayer no longer "Deliver us from evil," but "Deliver us from the evil one." (Laughter.) It is admitted that there are no MSS. which can be traced back beyond the beginning of the fourth century, but Mr.

Hatchard says I may say the same about any classical work. Not one of the originals of the Greek or Latin works which have come down to us is now extant, and it is urged by my opponent that I ought to treat them in the same fashion as I have treated the Bible. My reply to that is that it is precisely because I do treat the Bible in the same way as any other ancient book, that I require some proof as to the authorship and authenticity of what is therein contained. If I find a classical work in which are related a number of miraculous events, I do not believe them as matters of fact or of history any more than I believe in the miraculous events which the Bible narrates. We now come to what has been said about Dr. Tischendorf, and I may tell you that I do not lay much stress upon Tischendorf's authority, and I will tell you why. According to his own confession, he discovered one of these MSS. of which you have heard in a monastery on Mount Sinai, and while believing that he was in possession of the most priceless of treasures, the most ancient copy of the word of God in existence, he kept it to himself for fifteen years before he announced his unparalleled discovery to the world. The man who would thus keep for fifteen years the most valuable of the MSS. in the world is not a man, I say, who ought to be thoroughly relied on. I will now take up Josephus where I laid him down. I will give you the last point, and that is that the second and fourth sections run straight on, while the third section, which consists of this passage which is said to be a forgery, is not connected in sense with those two sections I have mentioned. The end of the second section reads thus: "Since the people were unarmed, and were caught by men prepared for what they were about, there were a great number of them slain by this means, and others of them ran away wounded; and thus an end was put to this sedition. . . . About the same time also another sad calamity put the Jews into disorder." I allege to you that these two paragraphs which I have read ought to be read consecutively without the intervention of the other paragraph, and that they make sense so read, while the first words of the fourth section have no meaning after the third. I have now disposed of the Latin writers. I have disposed of Josephus. I have said the best I can say briefly about them, and I shall best consult the time and the work before me if, instead of going over any ground twice,

I leave you to judge yourselves between myself and my opponent. I have now got four witnesses absolutely uncorroborated—four witnesses for whom we must try to find some sort of evidence, and I must remind you that we want overwhelming evidence, for no less a question than the supernatural character of Jesus is now at stake. I must say I regret that Jesus only came into the world to a very ignorant and barbarous nation, in an obscure corner, and in such a way that it was quite impossible for any large number of people to become aware of his existence in their midst. We have at least a right to expect that when four of his immediate followers, and witnesses of his alleged miracles sit down to give us an account of what they had seen, the veracity of our witnesses shall be unimpeached, that they shall give us a coherent account of their hero's life. I will take the point as to their competent knowledge first. You do not find it stated in the Gospels who the writers are, and, therefore, it is very difficult to judge of their competency as historians. Further, there is no lack of records in the early Church claiming to be, equally with the Four Gospels now under consideration, authentic narratives of the events which we have here recorded. We have, in fact, no less than thirty-four different Gospels in addition to the four which are now received, and seven of these at least have come down to us at the present day. We only know the others by extracts. Then, in Luke, I find that the author of Luke does not pretend that his Gospel stands by itself. Luke distinctly tells us: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also" (Luke i., 1—3). He does not even pretend that he is himself an eye-witness, and I say to my opponent that there is no proof of his accuracy or of the truth of his story. We have no less than ninety-eight other writings, which are said to be written by Peter, James, Matthias, Andrew, and others, fifty-six of which are still extant; so it is not only Matthew and John, among the apostles, who are singled out for the honor of writing Christ's story; the difficulty is to tell which are genuine and which spurious, for according to

Mosheim, it was a habit of the early Christians to take great names in order to cover the want of merit or truth in their compositions. He says: "For, not long after Christ's ascension into heaven, several histories of his life and doctrines, full of pious frauds and fabulous wonders, were composed by persons whose intentions, perhaps, were not bad, but whose writings discovered the greatest superstition and ignorance. Nor was this all: productions appeared which were imposed upon the world by fraudulent men, as the writings of the holy apostles" ("Ecclesiastical History," ed. 1847, p. 31). I quite agree with that view of Mosheim, and I leave it to you as a view of a Christian historian. I am told by my opponent that, passing for a moment the Four Gospels themselves, I shall find them proved by the Fathers of the Christian Church, and I am referred to Polycarp as one of the Christian Fathers on whom my opponent relies. I find my opponent says that he relies upon him, but I am bound to inform you that hardly any quotations can be got from Polycarp which are continuous with texts of the Gospels. My contention with regard to the Gospels is that of Dean Alford. There were a large number of early traditions floating about from mouth to mouth, which, after thus floating about, and being added to and changed in the course of many years, at last became crystallised in the form in which they are known to us. For instance, Polycarp says: "Beseeching the all-seeing God not to lead us into temptation, as the Lord hath said, the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak;" but such a conjunction of words is nowhere found in our Gospels. Coming now to Irenæus. Irenæus is a man for whom I have always had a considerable amount of sympathy, because he is the first man who really puts forward the idea of *Four* Gospels at all; but I must allow that my faith in him is shaken when I find him giving this as a quotation from John: "John related the words of the Lord concerning the times of the kingdom of God: the days would come when vines would grow, each with 10,000 shoots, and to each shoot 10,000 branches, and to each branch 10,000 twigs, and to each twig 10,000 clusters, and to each cluster 10,000 grapes, and each grape which is crushed will yield twenty-five measures of wine. And when one of the saints will reach after one of these clusters, another will cry: 'I am a better cluster than it;

take me, and praise the Lord because of me'" ("Iren. Hær.," v., 33). I cannot find that in the Gospel of John as we have it to-day. (Applause.) Then, when I find that the reasons which are given by this same Irenæus for accepting the Four Gospels are that there are four corners to the earth, and four spirits, and that Christ sits in the midst of four-faced Cherubims, I begin to be still more doubtful about him. (Laughter.) I allege, then, that I cannot accept such evidence as this, evidence which is absolutely unsatisfactory, and which we can only regard as the nonsensical ravings of a religious enthusiast. (Loud applause.)

The Rev. A. HATCHARD: As our time is precious, I proceed at once to business. If I remember rightly, Mrs. Besant challenged my reference to Suetonius. Mrs. Besant quoted from the Rev. Dr. Giles, from his book on the "Christian Records." I hold in my hand another book, which I shall be happy to give her if she has not got it. (Laughter.) It is called Dr. Giles's "Heathen Records." I quote from this, and there can be no double dealing in the matter, as Dr. Giles gives in the one page the Latin and the other the English. This is what Suetonius says with regard to "*Claudius*—He expelled from Rome the Jews who were continually making disturbances having Chrestus for their instigator." My version of it is this, and you Free-thinkers of London may laugh at it if you like: just about that particular time when Claudius Cæsar lived, there was a discussion and a dispute amongst the Jews in Rome about Jesus as to whether he was the Messiah; and Claudius Cæsar says to the Jews, "Depart! Go!" There, you have my version of it. Laugh at it if you like! (Much laughter.) "*Nero*—The Christians, a race of men of a new and baneful superstition, were punished." Now, *here* is the passage, I don't care what you make of it. Well now, I am not going to be led away by any red herring drawn across the trail. (A voice, "Argument!") I am arguing! I have told you that I believe in the miraculous element. Laugh if you like. (Laughter.) Now then, listen again, if you please. Mrs. Besant says that she does not think much of Irenæus, whose name you have mentioned here (pointing to diagram). I simply, and I say as briefly as I can, proceed with my argument. What Mrs. Besant says about Tacitus I will not say a word to you on. I have not the

slightest doubt that you will go away and say, "What an ignorant, benighted man"—("Question, question")—at least that is the way I believe you talk about clergymen. (Cries of "Question," and interruption.)

The CHAIRMAN: I think it will be better to go on with the argument, and not indulge in personalities. (Loud applause.)

MR. HATCHARD: Ladies and gentlemen, there is no animosity in my mind. I speak to you fearlessly and frankly. I stand here without fear or favor. If I understand Mrs. Besant's "Freethinkers' Text Book" rightly, she does admit here substantially in this book the accuracy of the passage in Tacitus. I may have misunderstood her. Very good; then I say I put the passage of Tacitus before you, and let me say all the Freethinkers in Europe—or any body of Freethinkers—cannot break it down. I have consulted with men older than myself. I have a knowledge of the Secularist party, not of to-day, but of twenty years or more. (Murmuring, and a voice, "Proceed to business.") I say now Mrs. Besant has told you that the Christians were known, as I understand her to say, before the time of Christ. Freethinkers of London, I stand here to say that there is not an atom of proof of that. I have read that little book ["Chrestos"] which is advertised in the *National Reformer*, and published by Williams and Norgate. I have read that, and I simply say I was rather amused in reading it. I simply pass it by. There is not an atom of proof. There were the sects of what are called the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. I challenge the proof, and know it can't be brought that Jesus of Nazareth belonged to the sect of the Essenes. Bring to me the proof that Jesus of Nazareth and John the Baptist belonged to the sect of the Essenes. Here let me give you this, and I am glad that Mrs. Besant has let herself into my hands. (Much laughter, and some applause.) I have a great respect for Mrs. Besant. (Applause.) I hope to see Mrs. Besant return to the Church of England. (Renewed laughter.) I hope to know that Mrs. Besant is from this platform preaching the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth. (Cries of "Question.") Mrs. Besant has challenged the testimony of Josephus to Jesus of Nazareth; but will she challenge it with regard to John the Baptist? Josephus gives you an account. I say that

Josephus substantially confirms the Gospel history when he gives you an account of John the Baptist, which nobody ventures to challenge, as far as I know; and grant me John the Baptist, and I will prove Jesus of Nazareth by collateral evidence. I don't care a straw about that passage about 10,000 this and 10,000 the other: it amounts to nothing. Now, before I sit down I want to drive home to you the testimony of St. Paul the Apostle. You can't tell me that Paul the Apostle never lived, for, if you do, I will overwhelm you with Jewish testimony. (Laughter.) Oh! I know all about this matter. Many of my friends are Jews, and I tell you Jews have armed me for this conflict. (Laughter.) If you want something to read I will make you a present of this (holding up a book); I believe you've got a library here. What do I find in Paul the Apostle's writings? He substantially corroborates the Gospel narrative, and he supplies several instances which the Gospels do not record. Now, then, I shall be told that Paul was deceived! that Paul was an enthusiast! that Paul was a demagogue! that he invented these things! that he was a dishonest man! Great heavens! I open the Epistle of the Romans and I read one of the most logical, convincing, and satisfactory works with regard to Christianity that could be penned. Read them! Are they the words of a dreamer? Are they the words of an enthusiast? Never! Why, ladies and gentlemen—members of Parliament, or who you please—(laughter)—they are the words of a sober, honest, cautious, logical thinker, a man brought up at the feet of the greatest of Jewish Rabbis—Gamaliel. (Slight applause.)

Mrs. BESANT, who then rose to make her concluding speech, and was received with hearty applause, said: I will first as briefly as possible finish the argument upon which I entered, showing the weakness of the evidence within the first century on which my opponent relies. The dispute which is supposed to be mentioned in Suetonius has nothing to do with this debate. If the persons there mentioned were Christians, if Suetonius did mention them, it goes for nothing in this argument; I admit the existence of the Christians, and I make this admission in order to show you that I don't trouble to stop and challenge that which might refer to Christians, but which does not refer to Christ. I neither deny, nor challenge, nor accept the reference to John

the Baptist in Josephus. It does not come within the limits of this discussion, which has reference only to the question of the existence of the historical Jesus depicted in the Gospels. Paul may have been a very wise man or a very foolish man. It does not touch the subject with which we have to deal to-night. I am still dealing with the first speech of my opponent, the one which contains all his real arguments. Speaking of Ignatius, whose name is put forward by Mr. Hatchard, I may say that I do not accept Ignatius as reliable. He tells us, indeed, that the star appeared to the magi, and further that "all the rest of the stars, with the sun and moon, formed a chorus to this star" (Ep. to the Ephesians, chap. xix.). Why rely on his story of the star and reject his story of the chorus? It is alleged with respect to Justin Martyr that the "Memoirs" of which he speaks are the same as the Gospels; but it is admitted by my opponent that many of the texts are not the same. Printing not being invented, we are told that the MSS. of these works were costly, and not attainable by the people, and that it is very likely in quoting from memory that these slight inaccuracies should occur. But I urge that the only reason for quoting these authorities at all is to show that their Gospels and yours are one and the same, and if you admit that the quotations are inaccurate what becomes of your proof? You have yet to prove that Justin Martyr had access to the same Gospels that we have to-day, and we must also remember that Justin Martyr quotes the Acts of Pilate as authoritative, just as he does the Memoirs. In quoting the text as to the sweat falling down as "drops of blood," I think that my opponent ought to have told you that the words "of blood" do not appear in Justin, and destroy his argument: Justin was trying to prove that the prophesy "My bones are poured out *like water*" was fulfilled in Christ, when "his sweat fell down like drops while he was praying" ("Dial." chap. ciii.). It is hardly fair to insert "of blood" in order to make a resemblance where there is none. Then again, if you take the story of Justin you will find it very different from the story of the Gospels. For instance, that Christ was born in a cave and not in a stable, and so on, with a mass of small discrepancies. You might fairly say: How do you explain the general likeness which you find in the four Gospels? I believe that various.



Churches had various oral versions of the life of Christ, and that as the years went on they grew vaguer and vaguer, and it was thought wise to write them down. This is the view taken by Dean Alford, and it is the one which I am inclined to adopt, in common with many others. This is the view which is taken by the Rev. Mr. Sanday, and which is to a great extent held by Canon Westcott. I allege—and I am quoting from Canon Westcott's work on the Canon, where he sums up the value of the evidence from the Apostolic Fathers:—"1. No Evangelic reference in the Apostolic Fathers can be referred certainly to a written record. 2. It appears most probable from the form of the quotations that they were derived from oral tradition. 3. No quotation contains any element which is not substantially preserved in our Gospels. 4. When the text given differs from the text of our Gospels, it represents a later form of Evangelic tradition. 5. The text of St. Matthew corresponds more nearly than the other synoptic texts with the quotations and references as a whole" ("Canon of the New Test.," ed. 1875, p. 62). That is the conclusion come to by Canon Westcott. That is, I should say, substantially accurate, save that I should of course, somewhat demur to his third statement. I turn then from this evidence which is no evidence at all, and I will only say further that if you want to break down the whole of the argument as to the existence of these written Gospels in the first century, turn to that remarkable work called "Supernatural Religion"—there you will find the Apostolic Fathers dealt with one by one with an exactness and detail which I cannot here pretend to use. I have, then, failed to find corroborative evidence outside; I have failed to find in the writings of the Fathers the enormous weight of evidence which I require. Remember, I want evidence of the miraculous. I have now to deal with four uncorroborated witnesses. Do I find that my four witnesses agree with one another? Do I find that their testimony is one? That the voice is one although it comes from four mouths? Remember the story of the birth of Jesus. Reconcile the story in Matthew with the story in Luke. Find how in one Gospel we are dealing with people who come from Nazareth. Read the other where you hear nothing at all of Nazareth in the first place, and when reference is made to it later, it is made in a way that clearly

indicates that it was not their own home, but a new place to them—"a city called Nazareth." Take the story of Herod, and I must say that it is strange that Josephus, who has told you the story of Herod with great fulness of detail, has not one word of this remarkable and monstrous crime. Pass around the story of the birth and take it bit by bit. See how Herod, instead of troubling himself about the wise men and their star, might have gone to the Temple, in Jerusalem his own capital, and there have seized the young child; remember how, according to Luke, Jesus was carried to the Temple, had sacrifice offered for him, was greeted by Simon, and rejoiced over by Anna. Take the difficulty that according to one account the young child and his mother fled down to Egypt to escape from Herod, and only returned after Herod's death, while according to the other they went up to Jerusalem, and after quietly performing all the duties imposed by the law, returned peacefully to "their own city, Nazareth." It must, indeed, be a miraculous child who managed to be at Nazareth and in Egypt at one and the same time. Pass to the story of the temptation. Do you believe that that is matter of history and not a myth? Do you believe that there was a wonderfully high mountain, so high and so curiously placed that from it you could see all round a sphere? and that Jesus and the devil went flying through the air to it, and then flew off to Jerusalem and perched on a pinnacle of the Temple, surely to the amazement of the people in the streets? Pass to the comparison of John and the three Synoptics. You will find they bear no likeness: that they are different in incidents, different in place, different in character. Pass to the story of the crucifixion, and learn how Christ was crucified at the third hour, although he was exposed by Pilate at the sixth, and how he was standing in full view of the people at the same hour that he was hanging on the cross, enveloped in miraculous darkness. I am dealing now with the historians themselves, having failed to get any satisfactory evidence outside the records for which we require proof. Pass to the story of the resurrection, the very centre of the Christian creed, and learn how one woman went according to one Gospel, and two, and "two and others," according to the rest; how they went while "it was yet dark," although the sun was rising; how they wondered when they found that

the stone was rolled away, although the stone was still there unrolled away, and they saw an angel come down and roll it away and sit on it. Learn how one angel, or two, or a young man, gave them a message to go to the disciples. Learn how Christ overtook them and gave them exactly the same message over again. Learn how the women were so frightened that they said nothing to any man, although they ran and told the disciples all that they had seen. Learn how the disciples went to Galilee although they remained in Jerusalem: how they saw Christ twice at least in Jerusalem, although they did not see him until they got to Galilee: learn how in Galilee some "doubted" his resurrection, although they had him before their eyes. Learn how Christ ascended up into heaven on the day of his resurrection, and then learn how he remained on earth forty days explaining the things concerning the kingdom of God. Don't take the contradictions on my word; but take the four Gospels, make if you can anything which will seem like a reconciliation of one to the other, and give a coherent life of Christ—that was my first step towards heresy. But if you ask me whence does the story come, I reply it is the story of the Sun-god spread through the whole of eastern lands—of the child born in mid-winter, in the sign of the Virgin, surrounded by winter's dangers, passing on through the signs of the Zodiac, struggling with darkness in the critical time of spring, rising at Easter, triumphing over his enemies, rising into mid-heaven, sitting on the right hand of God the Father, sending down his beams to make the bread and the wine, symbols of his very body and blood. Whence does Christ come? He comes not only from the Sun-god, but from Chrishna, the incarnate Indian deity, Chrishna, born of Devaki, hymned by Devas, flying from the wrath of Kansa. Chrishna, who had the children slain around him while he escaped; Chrishna, healing the sick, causing the lame to walk, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead, crucified, risen, ascended. You will find him with the sacred stigmata on his hands and feet, carven in the ancient Indian temples which remain to-day. Where does Christ come from? He comes from every place where superstition has been stronger than science. He comes from every land where people have for ages marvelled at the mysteries around them which they could not understand; where they made their theories first and found their

facts afterwards. I urge to you that my opponent has failed. The Fathers have lamentably broken down in their evidence. No Pagan writer gives us any fact which can buttress the Christ of the Gospels; and when you come to your four witnesses you cannot for one moment trust them—you cannot for one moment believe them, when they tell you the story of your Christ. I say of him in the words of the Roman poet: "All these figments of crack-brained opiniatry and silly solaces played off in the sweetness of song by deceitful poets, by you, too credulous creatures, have been shamefully reformed and made over to your god." (Loud and continued applause, and cries of "Bravo!")

MR. HATCHARD: I shall not for one moment contend with Mrs. Besant in her eloquence, for to-night I stand here to bear witness for the truth, and on this platform of all places in London. I stand here to vindicate the indisputable, historical, and most important facts that the world knows of. I simply tell you that, beside the Heathen testimony, which I have only briefly alluded to to-night, there is a great deal of Jewish testimony which I have not time to go into. Mrs. Besant has referred to the book entitled "Supernatural Religion." Here it is; and I tell you that that book has been dissected like an anatomist would dissect a body. Get Westcott on the "Canon of the New Testament" 4th edition, and read his Preface, and see what he says. I ask, is not the author of "Supernatural Religion" shown to be untrustworthy? Mr. Cowper told me to be sure and mention here to-night that Mr. Nicholson, of the London Institution, had examined his quotations and found them to be inaccurate. We have heard a good deal from Mrs. Besant in her last speech about Chrishna and such like, but she has made her remarks to the wrong opponent. I spent years in investigating the Indian religion, and next week I will endeavor to go at length into what Christianity has done in India, and I will introduce to your notice Chrishna—that is Vishnu. Why, there is no dispute whatever. (Cries of "Order," and "Question.") I say that the whole story that Mrs. Besant has brought before you is not worth a single mention. I say distinctly about it, that you can't prove that the story of Chrishna was in existence in India at an early period. It was probably known about the sixth century. You shall hear something about Vishnu next

week. You shall see him. Chrishna is identified with Vishnu, and if I were not in a public hall I would tell you some nice tales about Chrishna. In the old Jewish traditions there are so many facts of the Gospels corroborated, and there is one fact which is related in the Talmud, which I will mention to you. It is there stated that about forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem the power of life and death was taken away from the Jews, and so it happened that Pilate was the person who had to put Jesus of Nazareth to death. I know all about the Cross in Heathen countries. I know it all. Produce me—you can't produce me—the crucified Saviors besides Jesus of Nazareth. If I had followed the bent of my own inclination I should have brought with me and quoted a whole host of German authorities, but when I went to Stonecutter Street the other day, and there saw Mr. Ramsey, I found that Mr. Ramsey didn't seem to think much of German authorities.\* He turned up his nose at them. (Laughter.) Well, I thought, you are a fair specimen of the men I shall have to meet, and I won't quote them. I could have quoted you from a large number of German authorities, for they have been my prophets for many years past. But I bring before you a book, by Grotius, on the "Truth of Christian Religion." I have never seen the book answered. "*Sect. II. The proof that there was such a person as Jesus.*"—That Jesus of Nazareth formerly lived in Judea, in the reign of Tiberius the Roman emperor, is constantly acknowledged, not only by Christians dispersed all over the world, but also by all the Jews which now are, or have ever wrote since that time: the same is also testified by heathens, that is, such as did not write either of the Jewish or of the Christian religion, Suetonius, Tacitus, Pliny the younger, and many after these. *That he died an ignominious death.*—That the same Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate, the president of Judea, is acknowledged by all the same Christians, notwithstanding it might seem dishonorable to them who worship such a Lord. It is also acknowledged by the Jews, though they are not ignorant how much they lie under the displeasure of the Christians, under whose government they

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\* It is due to Mr. Ramsey to say that he entirely denies this assertion of Mr. Hatchard.

everywhere live, upon this account, because their ancestors were the cause of Pilate's doing it. Likewise, the heathen writers we mentioned have recorded the same to posterity; and, a long time after, the acts of Pilate were extant, to which the Christians sometimes appealed. Neither did *Julian*, or other opposers of Christianity, ever call it in question. So that no history can be imagined more certain than this; which is confirmed by the testimonies, I don't say, of so many men, but of so many people, which differed from each other. Notwithstanding which, we find him worshipped as Lord throughout the most distant countries of the world. *Sect. III. And yet, after his death, was worshipped by wise men.*—And that not only in our age, or those immediately foregoing, but also even in the first, the age next to that in which it was done, in the reign of the emperor Nero; at which time the fore-mentioned Tacitus and others attest, that very many were punished because they professed the worship of Christ." I say, I put this problem to Mrs. Besant, and I should like her to write some articles upon it, which I promise to read. If Jesus of Nazareth never rose from the dead, how comes the belief, not only of the Apostle Paul, but of the early Christians, that such was the fact? You come down, I say, upon the fact, or believed fact, that it was Jesus and the Resurrection that these early preachers of the Gospels believed in, that it was believed that it was decided by abundant witnesses. How came the extraordinary change in the Apostle Peter if the Resurrection never took place? Peter before and Peter after the Resurrection are as opposite as light and darkness. The trembling coward who forsook his master and denied him, the man who afterwards wept bitterly, was the man who stood boldly before the Jewish Sanhedrim, who told them the bitter truth right home as I have told you here to-night; told them that it was this very Jesus who had been raised from the dead. Peter went forth into the world a bold, brave, man to do his duty. Then there was St. John and Paul; but Paul was deceived, you will say. How came it that all the early disciples of Jesus Christ were deceived? How came this doctrine preached in Jerusalem immediately after the Crucifixion if it was myth and fable? I simply tell Mrs. Besant that I know as much about the Sun-god as she can tell me; I simply stop here to say whatever truth there may be

in these myths and fables of the Sun-god that immediately after the Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, the story of his Resurrection was proclaimed in Jerusalem. (Cries of "Proof.") Yes, amongst Freethinkers and Sceptics. There is an abundant amount of testimony of every imaginary kind that it was Jesus and the Resurrection which was the belief of the early Christians. All through the Acts of the Apostles, all through the Epistles of St. Paul, all through the early Christian writers in the early centuries, it was the belief in this. It was preached at the city and at the time, by the men, in the place; and I take it such men as St. Paul, Peter, James, John, and others, were far better judges than we are here to-night whether the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, in whom I firmly believe, took place or not. (Applause.)

A vote of thanks to the Chairman, proposed by Mrs. BESANT, and seconded by the Rev. A. HATCHARD, was then carried unanimously, and the proceedings terminated.

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## SECOND NIGHT.

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SUBJECT:—

*“That the Influence of Christianity upon the world has been Injurious.”*

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MR. BRADLAUGH IN THE CHAIR.

THE CHAIRMAN in opening the proceedings said: My duty as Chairman is not likely to involve any sort of need for any work on my part provided you of the audience understand two things. First, that you have no right during the time either of the disputants is speaking to challenge any remark that either of them may make. Any cry of “Question”—any cry of disapprobation—is entirely out of place. Those of you who are in favor of either of the speakers may applaud if you please; but you must remember even then that sometimes you waste their time in doing that. To call “Question,” or to make any other remark, is entirely out of place, and only does an injury to the debate. I do not know that I need trouble you with anything else except to mention that the rule of the debate is that the opener shall have 30 minutes; Mr. Hatchard 30 minutes in reply; and then five speeches of 15 minutes alternately, the opener concluding as on the last occasion. The subject for debate for this evening is the proposition to be affirmed by Mrs. Besant—“That the influence of Christianity on the world has been injurious.” I now call upon Mrs. Besant to open the debate. (Applause.)

Mrs. BESANT, who was warmly greeted, said: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Hatchard and Friends: The affirmation that I make to-night is “That the influence of Christianity upon the world has been injurious.” I propose, in my first speeches, to give you a mass of facts on which I rely for proof of this affirmation, and, even at the risk of wearying you, to give you a condensed statement of historical occurrences which serve as foundation for the position I take to-night. In my last speech I will sum these up, but in the



earlier ones, I shall merely pile up my facts which you can verify for yourselves. In order to lend clearness and vigor to the affirmation, and to render it, if false, more easy to refute, I propose not to make a general and discursive attack, but to endeavor to prove five special propositions. I allege of Christianity: 1. That it has discouraged learning. 2. That it has supported tyranny, and has been the enemy of liberty. 3. That it has used persecution more largely than any other creed. 4. That it has upheld and aggravated slavery. 5. That it has not ensured purity of morals. If I can prove these propositions, it will be fair for me to say "that the influence of Christianity on the world has been injurious." I allege, further, that the whole of this mischief has its root in the Christian theory, and that each of the faults alleged in the propositions may be defended by Holy Writ. That, therefore, these faults are not excrescences on Christianity, due to the wickedness of man, but are portions of the creed itself, and that modern Christianity in partly escaping from them has become less Christian while becoming more civilised. I propose to show the root of each of these faults in Christian theory, and then to demonstrate its development in Christian practice. (Applause.) 1. *That Christianity has discouraged learning.* Throughout the Bible knowledge is an accursed thing. For eating of the tree of knowledge man was expelled from Paradise; Solomon, said to be the wisest of men, gives his judgment as follows: "Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that were before me in Jerusalem; yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Eccles. i., 16—18). Isaiah prophesied against Babylon: "Thy wisdom and thy knowledge it hath perverted thee" (Isa. xlvii., 10). Jesus proclaimed: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. xi., 25). Paul wrote: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to

confound the wise" (1 Cor. i., 26-27). Again: "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise" (Ibid ii., 18). Again: "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth" (Ibid viii., 1). There are many more of the same type which time forbids me to quote. This beatitude of nescience was very acceptable to the classes among which Christianity first spread, and the natural result of canonising ignorance and anathematising knowledge was very soon seen. Mosheim tells us of even the great lights of the second century, that "they are worthy of little admiration on account of the accuracy or depth of their reasonings. The most of them appear to have been destitute of penetration, learning, order, application and force" ("Ecclesiastical History," ed. 1847, p. 53). As the centuries went on the darkness grew deeper and deeper; Hallam tells us that schools were "confined to cathedrals and monasteries" and were "exclusively designed for the purposes of religion": that Charlemagne and Alfred were the greatest scholars of their time, but that Charlemagne could not read, and Alfred had but an imperfect knowledge of Latin: of the "prevailing ignorance," he says, "it is easy to produce abundant testimony. Contracts were made verbally, for want of notaries capable of drawing up charters; and these, when written, were frequently barbarous and ungrammatical to an incredible degree. For some considerable intervals, scarcely any monument of literature has been preserved, except a few jejune chronicles, the vilest legends of saints, or verses equally destitute of spirit and metre. In almost every council, the ignorance of the clergy forms a subject for reproach. It is asserted by one held in 992, that scarcely a single person was to be found in Rome itself who knew the first element of letters. Not one priest of a thousand in Spain, about the age of Charlemagne, could address a common letter of salutation to another. In England, Alfred declares that he could not recollect a single priest south of the Thames (the most civilised part of England), at the time of his accession, who understood the ordinary prayers, or could translate Latin into his mother-tongue. Nor was this better in the time of Dunstan, when it is said, none of the clergy knew how to write or translate a Latin letter. The homilies which they preached were compiled for their

use by some bishops, from former works of the same kind, or the writings of the Christian fathers" ("Europe during the Middle Ages," ed. 1869, pp. 595-596). In the tenth century a little light struggled to penetrate from Moorish Spain into Christendom, but for a long time with small success, for wherever a mind struggled to think, Christianity promptly shut it up; in Spain itself 119 men were imprisoned by the Inquisition, not for heresy, but for science; Roger Bacon, a monk of the thirteenth century, bears witness to the prevailing ignorance: "Without mathematical instruments no science can be mastered," he complains sadly, "and these instruments are not to be found among the Latins, and could not be made for two or three hundred pounds. . . . The admirable books of Cicero de Republicâ are not to be found anywhere, so far as I can hear, though I have made anxious inquiry for them in different parts of the world, and by various messengers. I could never find the works of Seneca, though I made diligent search for them during twenty years and more. And so it is with many more most useful books connected with the science of morals" (Green's "Short History of the English People," ed. 1878, pp. 133-134). His own studies were rewarded with bread and water and a dungeon, and pen and paper were taken from him; he died in the prison of his monastery. In the same spirit Torquemada burned 6,000 priceless oriental books. Not a single great discovery lightens Christendom from the time whereat Christianity destroyed Pagan science until the stir of mental life brought about by heresy. Calvin, among Reformers, hated knowledge as Torquemada among Romanists; Calvinists hunted Bruno from Geneva if Catholics burned him at Rome. Later, Buckle gives a long list of learned men imprisoned merely for their science. (See "History of Civilisation," vol. ii., pp. 230-242, ed. 1869.) To-day, all the chief leaders of thought are outside the pale of the churches. Mill, Darwin, Spencer, Bain, Huxley, Tyndall, Clifford—these, the moulders of this century's thought, are alien to the Christian creed, and hated by the Christian Churches. I affirm, therefore, that "Christianity has discouraged learning." (Applause.) 2. *That Christianity has supported tyranny, and has been the enemy of liberty.* Passive submission has ever been the political doctrine of the

Church. Paul commanded: "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Romans xii., 1-2). Peter, in the same spirit, taught: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors. . . . Honor the king" (1 Peter ii., 13, 14, 17). Kings have granted huge wealth to priests, and priests, in return, have taught absolute submission to kings. Mosheim thinks that Constantine turned Christian because he saw "the admirable tendency of the Christian doctrine and precepts to promote the stability of government, by preserving the citizens in their obedience to the reigning powers" (Ibid, p. 87). According to the same historian, Charlemagne converted the Saxons to Christianity for the same reason, hoping that the Gospel would "induce them to submit more tamely to the Government of the Franks" (Ibid, p. 170). It is noticeable that dissent, which is always a step towards Freethought, is, in civil struggles, on the side of freedom, while the orthodox creed is always on the side of passive obedience. Thus Cromwell the Independent, Milton the Socinian, and Martin the Atheist, fought side by side for liberty against Charles and his bishops. In the same spirit, during the struggle under James II., the Church taught the duty of passive obedience, and preached that resistance to the king was a sin against God. I affirm, therefore, "that Christianity has supported tyranny." (Applause.)

(3) *That it has used persecution more largely than any other creed.* The duty of persecution is taught both in the Old and New Testaments. The passages in Deuteronomy are well known: it is commanded touching the heretic: "Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people" (Deut. xiii., 8, 9); touching a city of heretics: "Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword" (Ibid 15): this we are assured

“is right in the eyes of the Lord thy God” (Ibid 18). Many other passages of like spirit are familiar to you. In the New Testament the Christians are weak, and the vengeance against heretics is partly delayed till the next world. In fact, as they could not burn in this world, they were comforted with the hope that their enemies should burn on the other side of the grave. (Laughter and applause.) Jesus promised: “Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city” (Matthew x., 14, 15). The same spirit is shown in Luke xix., 27: “But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.” Nay, persecution was to enter into social life: John writes to the “elect lady:” “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house” (2nd John, 10). The power of the sword passed into the hands of Christianity when Constantine ascended the throne A.D. 324. In 380–394 fifteen statutes were passed, by which Pagans and heretics were forbidden to meet, were made incapable of making wills or of receiving legacies and so on. In fact, you have some of the same wicked enactments that still disgrace your English Statute Book in the nineteenth century. At this same date the first heretic was burned in Spain; in 1784 in the same country the last human sacrifice by fire was offered up to Christ. Between these two stakes who can measure the misery wrought by Christian hands? I give you a few instances; you can fill in more from your own reading. The Empress Theodora in Armenia, in the ninth century, put 100,000 Paulician heretics to death; in the twelfth 60,000 Albigenses were massacred in one town alone; in the fifteenth 3,000 persons were burned alive, and 17,000 fined or imprisoned for life in Andalusia during one year; during another 950 persons were burned alive in the town of Ville Reale; in another the Jews were expelled and died by thousands, while in 1502 the number of the expelled was raised to three millions, the Moors being driven out, and a vast number perished on the way. Torquemada has the following record: “Burnt at the stake alive, 10,220; burnt in effigy, the persons having died in prison or fled the

country, 6,860; punished with infamy, confiscation, perpetual imprisonment, or loss of civil rights, 97,321: total, 114,401" ("Freethinker's Text-Book," Part II., p. 472). Cardinal Ximenes has 52,855 victims. In Spain alone 31,912 persons were burned alive, and 291,450 more perished for heresy; in the Netherlands Alva put 18,000 heretics to death, by his own confession, and 50,000 were put to death in the year 1566 only; in 1572, 14,000 Huguenots were slain in Paris, and tens of thousands more throughout France; Henry VIII. of England slew 500 heretics who rejected his "Six Articles;" Mary killed 277 Protestants, Elizabeth a large number of Roman Catholics; in Ireland Roman Catholics were under the most cruel laws; the misery there to-day is largely due to Christianity, Orange fanaticism and Popish bigotry being equally bloodthirsty, and Ireland will never be at peace until heresy has cured the brutality generated by Christianity; in Scotland Dissenters were killed and tortured. Christian leaders proclaimed the duty of persecution: "In Germany, Luther cried, 'Why, if men hang the thief upon the gallows, or if they put the rogue to death, why should not we with all our strength, attack these popes and cardinals, these dregs of the Roman Sodom? Why not wash our hands in their blood?'" Sandys, Bishop of London, wrote in defence of persecution. Archbishop Usher, in an address signed by eleven other bishops, said, 'Any toleration to the papists is a grievous sin.' Knox said, 'The people are bound in conscience to put to death the queen, along with all her priests.' The English Parliament said, 'Persecution was necessary to advance the glory of God.' The Scotch Parliament decreed death against Catholics as idolators, saying 'it was a religious obligation to execute them'" ("Freethinker's Text-Book," Part II., p. 474). I admit that most religions persecute more or less, but let my opponent, if he can, produce the record of any superstition drenched in blood as is this Christianity; until such a record is produced I affirm "*that Christianity has used persecution more largely than any other creed.*"

(4) *That it has upheld and aggravated slavery.* Slavery is admittedly taught in the Old Testament (Lev. xxv., 44); it is nowhere denounced in the New. On the contrary, slaves, euphemistically translated servants in our Bible, are exhorted to be obedient and submissive, and Paul sent back

to his master a fugitive slave, recognising his rights of property. Let me say at once that slavery was universal in the Old World. But it was surely the duty of Christianity to strive against this universal curse. Instead of so doing it was silent respecting the wrong, and even aggravated the bad condition of the slave. A very remarkable testimony is given in a most unexpected quarter to the supreme vileness of Christian slavery. Charles Dickens was admittedly a Christian, yet here in his own journal, we have the following: "Indeed, one of the most horrible features in this most horrible traffic is the fact that fathers sell their children, and brothers their brothers, without thought or care; that fathers and brothers do worse than sell to another master their daughters and sisters; that all natural duties are violated, and all natural boundaries overpassed. In no other country, and under no other condition of slavery, have such things been done before. In Mohammedan slavery, natural ties are respected as sacredly as the most perfectly legal ties, and the moralities of society are regarded and enforced from bond as well as from free. . . . Slave-owners would as soon think of preserving conjugal fidelity among their sheep and horses as among their slaves. The farmer who sells his calf, and the planter who sells the suckling from the mother's breast, act with exactly the same feeling, and from the same motive. . . . This has never been in any age of the world's history before. Judaism, the Greek and Roman times, Mohammedanism, all recognised the rights of nature in their slaves. Christianity is the only faith whose professors have violated and destroyed these rights" (*Household Words*, Vol. XIV., p. 137). (Loud applause.)

Mr. HATCHARD, who was greeted with applause, then rose to reply. He said: Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, before I enter to-night upon what I have really to say I want to say one word, and that is this, I am exceedingly obliged to all those friends who have written me a lot of letters regarding this debate, telling me what I was to say and what I was not to say. But I can only use my own brains and not other people's, and if I don't follow the course that some persons present say that I ought to take, it is because I think I am doing the right thing in what I am about to do. I may say at once that I don't intend to follow Mrs. Besant over all the ground she has gone upon,

but to tell you another story. I fully expected that she would follow the course which she has to-night, because she has printed these opinions. I will give you another picture, which is a contrast to the picture which she has presented to you. It has been said by some persons that Christianity did not introduce many new intellectual truths to the world. That is directly the fact, but my contention is that, in short, both the revolution and the revelation of Christianity—that the change effected by Christianity—was a moral one and not an intellectual one. I say that Christianity has nothing at all that is not in harmony with the highest philosophy and the highest science, and I am prepared to prove that; but I do say most distinctly that Christianity was intended to be a moral revelation to the world, and I stand here to challenge the world to-night to contradict that which I am about to set before you. I suppose there is no person present who has not read at some time or other the first chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans. If you have not read that I do most earnestly request you to do so when you get home, and to ponder it and think most carefully over it. I may be told at once that it is only St. Paul who speaks this, and, in short, that he is not worth attention. Let me tell you that St. Paul simply gives the words of many of the writers of antiquity—he exactly gives us a picture of the heathen vices of his time, which, Ladies and Gentlemen, are so truly abominable and defiling that before an audience in which there are a great many ladies I would rather not read the verses. If there were only Mr. Bradlaugh and a few gentlemen here, and the doors were locked, I would not mind going into these subjects. (Much laughter.) I have told you that that was the state of the heathen world, and that it was a true and faithful picture of what the heathen world was at the time of St. Paul. Now, mind you, St. Paul is corroborated by a mass of testimony, and by a number of evidences which are literally overwhelming. You may ask me what were some of the prominent vices which were practised at the time of St. Paul. Slavery was one, and slavery was universal. I may be a most ignorant person, but I say that Jesus Christ had love to man; I see that St. Paul had this: I see in the principle of Christian brotherhood that there was laid the great principle which opposed



slavery in the ancient Roman world; and, with all due deference to our Chairman, I say that it was Christian principle and Christian feeling which opposed slavery in the Southern States of America. ("Oh!") You may think I am a very ignorant man in saying this, but I say it was Christian feeling in the Roman Empire, too, that was the cause of slavery being gradually given up. From different councils and different ancient authors we see that it was the Church of which you have heard so much to-night that stood between the slaves and their masters—that extended the power of her protecting hand or arm on their behalf. A Roman Catholic friend of mine—a Roman Catholic mark you!—has taken the trouble to collect in the British Museum for me a whole mass of authorities upon this question, and I tell you that they are so voluminous that they have astonished me. I will give Mrs. Besant my notes if they are of any use to her. (Laughter and cries of "Oh!") I speak respectfully. Just for a moment or two let me refer you to Juvenal. Juvenal is truly what is called a satirist. Juvenal, mind you, was not a burlesque writer. Now let me tell you that Juvenal is one of the greatest names in Roman literature; and any of you who cannot read the Latin may buy a translation for about a shilling. Now I say distinctly that what is taught here is exactly the truth. This is Dryden's translation. I wish there were no ladies here. (Laughter.) The sixth satire is so bad that I cannot read it before this audience. I say the picture of vice, and immorality, and profligacy here is something which is simply alarming. Now our Chairman knows the Luxembourg, in Paris. They have a collection of beautiful pictures there, and amongst them there is a splendid painting of "The Romans of the decadence," and of the profligacy depicted by Juvenal and St. Paul. There is shown what Juvenal says and what St. Paul says. I hold in my hand "Horace." Listen just to this. This is a quotation which I looked out this afternoon. It occurs in the first book of his Satires and in the third Satire. He is speaking about the punishment of the slaves and he goes on in this way: "Lastly, since the vice of ire, likewise other vices adhering to fools, cannot be cut off entirely; why does not reason use her own weights and measures, and, as each thing is, so coerce offences by punishment? If anyone should fix that slave on a cross, who having been ordered

to take away a dish shall have licked the half-eaten fishes and warm sauce; among sane persons he would be called more insane than Labeo." ["The Classical Student's Translation of Horace," ed. 1844, pp. 160, 161]. Do you understand what this means? (No!) It means this, that a man—mind you, this Horace was a heathen!—a slave who simply partakes of a piece of any delicacy—say a fish, is punished, his master having supreme power over him, by ordering him away to be crucified on that account, and that is the custom or practice which Horace alludes to. The cruelty, the vice, and the immorality of the Roman Empire is something that you can hardly credit. There are no common books which give a good account of this, simply because the majority of authors do not like to defile their pages with the immorality and licentiousness that abounds in these classics, but here is one which does. This is a well-known book which was published some hundred years ago. It is called "The Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation shown from the state of Religion in the Ancient Heathen World." It is by John Leland, Doctor of Divinity, who Mr. Bradlaugh well knows is the author of a book against the Deists. I say that that book is a black, appalling, fearful picture of what the state of the heathen world was morally. I say nothing about Jerusalem when Jesus of Nazareth came into the world. Don't take my word for it, but listen attentively to what I say, and I stand here against all the Freethinkers of England; I stand here before all the world to bring evidence of what I have said of the awful and appalling vices in Rome and the neighboring nations at the time when Jesus came into the world. It was because Christ came with the pure Gospel, because it reprov'd and denounced the follies of the time; because it taught purity of morals and uprightness of life that a large number of the heathens were so opposed to it and Him. Why, if you will only get these two small volumes you will see for yourselves. These two books are "The Early Empire" and the "Age of the Antonines," by Mr. Capes, the Reader of Ancient History in the University of Oxford. Now the truth is this, these two books give the same kind of account, but not so extended as I have told you with regard to Leland. I am going on at great length showing you the state of the heathen world because I think it is very

important that you should know what the world was like at that time, and what Christianity has done to make it better. If you will only look carefully over the pages of another author, Mosheim, you can see most clearly what were some of the vices, and how Christianity operated in correcting these follies, in teaching these people higher and nobler views of life. I say the influence of these truths was such that at the time they were preached they purified the people. Within the first few years their effects were not so apparent, but as time rolled on—between the time of Paul and the time of Constantine—the rapid advance in teaching men nobler and higher ways of life was apparent in that age, and is apparent on the page of history. Why, Ladies and Gentlemen, I should hardly dare to tell you what so great a man as Plato taught! What did Plato teach? Did Plato allow fornication? Did Plato appoint a community of women in his Republic? That is men were to have wives in common. Read Plato's "Republic"! You see how these vices were the great curse of the Heathen world. They were really a large part of the means of the decline of the Roman Empire. If I do nothing else to-night than leave this upon your minds let me tell you again that the change wrought by Christianity was a moral change. I did not hear the book mentioned by Mrs. Besant, but the view placed before you by Mrs. Besant was much the same as is presented in Draper's "Conflict between Science and Religion." In that book you get a one-sided view, and I tell you that there might be a very different picture painted by another hand. Christianity was not so much intended to be an intellectual change as a moral change, and I stand here to-night to tell you that that moral change was effected in the Roman Empire by Christianity to a very great extent. I believe I may say entirely so. You will say it may be true, but Christianity is now worn out, and people do not believe in it, in short that it is dead. I stand here to-night to bring before you facts as to what Christianity effected in the Roman Empire in the first three centuries, between the time of Jesus of Nazareth and the time of Constantine, and also facts as to the great change which has been effected in India during the last eighty years. I stand before you to-night to defend Christianity from

this charge of being dead. I can defend it, and have done so through a large part of England and Ireland before to-night. Mrs. Besant told you last week in very eloquent words about Chrishna. There is not an atom, not a tittle of proof that the story of Chrishna existed before the time of Jesus of Nazareth. I hold in my hand a book that is somewhat well-known. It is this; "Christ and other Masters: an Historical Enquiry," by Archdeacon Hardwick. This book is published by Macmillan. His object is to draw a picture of the various religions of the ancient world, and he goes very elaborately into the question of the religions in India. I stand here before you to-night to tell you that there is not a tittle of proof to show that the story of Chrishna, as we know it in the Indian books of to-day, existed before the time of Jesus of Nazareth; but there is a very great amount of evidence to show that the story of Chrishna became popular in India, about the sixth century, in the form in which we know it now, and you would be astonished to see the evidence which Archdeacon Hardwick gives in this book. His notion appears to be that the original story about Chrishna got mixed up with the story of our Gospels, when they found their way into India. (A laugh.) Let me tell the gentleman who laughs that I can prove it to be the truth, and I tell the gentleman who laughs that I have made it my business to understand these things. I cannot finish my subject to-night. Sometime in January or February I hope to come here and lecture on these subjects. (Applause.) I can lecture for an hour, and I shall be happy to meet Mrs. Besant in the same way as we meet now if she likes. In India they chiefly worship three gods—Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. Now, I only, to-night, have to do with Vishnu. Vishnu is the second person of the Hindu Triad or Trinity. Don't confound this with our doctrine of the Trinity. Only ignorant persons do so! (Laughter.) There is no similarity or resemblance, and no one who knows anything of the subject would confound them. This person, Vishnu, whose name means to enter or pervade, the Hindus believe has had nine incarnations in the past, and one incarnation in the time which is to come. I say this Vishnu is supposed to have been nine times incarnate, and he has one to come in the future. In one of these incarnations he is called Chrishna, and he is

one of the most popular gods in India in some parts. Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to be a free man! I don't challenge persecution or prosecution, and, therefore, I am not going to tell you about Chrishna to-night; but I have books on this platform that if the Chairman likes to read to you I will see that he is sent to prison for doing it. (Laughter.) I hold in my hands Ward's "History, Literature, and Religion of the Hindus." What is Ward's evidence? These books are the original, and they were printed in India. What does Ward, who stands unchallenged before the world, say? He gives a picture of degradation, of fearful immorality, in India, which he dare not print in English. I could tell you a tale, but I won't. (Laughter, applause and hisses.) Ladies and gentlemen, you know I have been brought on to the Freethinkers' platform, and I must do my duty; and the heads of the Church in London, who know well I am here and what I am doing, and who have sanctioned my coming, will hold me responsible if I don't do my duty. (Applause, mingled with laughter.) Now, then, besides the evidence which is supplied by Ward, I hold in my hand the memoirs read before the Anthropological Society of London, volume ii., page 264. Dr. James Hunt, an intimate friend and acquaintance of mine, was the President. It is headed "Some Remarks on Indian Gnosticism or Sacti Puja, the worship of the Female Powers," by Edward Sellon, Esq. I don't wish to get sent to prison, and I don't wish to read it to you. The worst of this is in Latin, and it shows distinctly the same kind of black picture of degradation, of vice, of immorality that existed in the Roman Empire at the time when Juvenal wrote his satires, and when Horace wrote his satires which I have referred to. What about Christianity? I stand here to-night fearlessly before all the Freethinkers of this country, and I say, Christianity has so altered the whole tone of Indian society during the last eighty years—has so completely and thoroughly altered the moral tone that now there is a totally opposite state of things to what there was eighty years ago. I came here armed for the fray, I told you last week. I have brought with me testimonies to the results of Christian Missions which I trust that our Chairman and Mrs. Besant will look at—at least I earnestly pray that they will..

(Laughter and applause). There are testimonies from the late Lord Lawrence, Lord Northbrook, Lord Napier, Sir Bartle Frere—(Oh! oh! laughter and hisses)—Sir Donald Macleod, late Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, and Sir Richard Temple; there are so many that I won't go over more of them, except Professor Monier Williams. Let me tell you, Freethinkers, that these testimonies no one can shake down, that there is a mass of evidence to show what Christianity has done in India—(interruption)—of what Christianity has done in India. Keep quiet. That they are simply overwhelming, and before I have done with you this night I will show it you, and more still. It will be said that Christianity is dead. Gracious! how ignorant you must be!

Mr. Hatchard's time here expired, and he sat down amid slight applause.

The CHAIRMAN: In calling upon Mrs. Besant now to address you, I must request both disputants to address themselves to the question, and not to personal remarks. (Applause.)

Mrs. BESANT: Let me say at once that in dealing with my opponent's speech I shall not take up to-night the question of the likeness between Chrishna and Christ. Our subject for debate to-night is not "The historical character of the Jesus of the Gospels," but "That the influence of Christianity upon the world has been injurious." The proper place to have dealt with Chrishna, about whom my rev. opponent has told you so much to-night, was in last week's debate. It is out of place to do so in the present debate, and I trust he will not think me wanting in courtesy if I entirely leave the question of Chrishna in presenting to you my view of the subject at issue. There are various points, however, which distinctly challenge my position. We are told about the moral change that Christianity has wrought in the world. You may remember that my fifth proposition was that Christianity has not purified public morals. Therefore, I have come prepared to deal with that part of the subject. I will first take the allusions to slavery which we have heard, because I have not quite finished what I was about to say on that subject. Mr. Hatchard has urged that it was the custom, dealing with a remark of Horace's, to crucify slaves in Rome for very slight faults. I do not think it is fair to say, that

because a Roman poet says that a master would be mad to crucify his slave for a small fault, therefore crucifixion of slaves for small faults was general. Allow, as I do allow, that wherever you get slavery you get the brutalisation of the masters as well as of the slaves, yet I will ask you to contrast the words of the Roman poet, stamping cruelty as madness, with the words of Jehovah, the God of the Jews: "If a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished. Notwithstanding, if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished: for he is his money" (Exodus xxi., 20-21). I think Horace was a better moralist than Jehovah. But I am told that Christian feeling opposed slavery in the Southern States of America. I shall have to deal with that in a moment, but I will now take up the question of slavery where I laid it down. So far from Christianity discouraging slavery, if you turn to Hallam's history you will find the following. I quote Hallam because he is often called the judicious Hallam, and it throws a halo of respectability over my arguments. "It is an humiliating proof of the degradation of Christendom, that the Venetians were reduced to purchase the luxuries of Asia by supplying the slave-market of the Saracens. . . . This trade was not peculiar to Venice. In England, it was very common, even after the Conquest, to export slaves to Ireland; till, in the reign of Henry II., the Irish came to a non-importation agreement which put a stop to the practice" ["Europe during the Middle Ages," pp. 613-614]. And in a note he adds: "William of Malmsbury accuses the Anglo-Saxon nobility of selling their female servants, even when pregnant by them, as slaves to foreigners. I hope there were not many of these Yaricoes; and should not perhaps have given credit to an historian rather prejudiced against the English, if I had not found too much authority for the general practice." That is the testimony of Hallam that Christians were wont to sell slaves, and female slaves, not only to their fellow-Christians, but even to the Mahommedans, the Saracens, and sold them in a condition which at least should have aroused a feeling of humanity. I pass from the testimony of Hallam, and I draw your attention to the very different way in which the Mahommedans, who were not Christians, were taught to treat their slaves.

Everyone who knows the history of slavery in America knows how the female slaves had their children born to their masters torn from them, and how you absolutely thus found the father selling his own daughter, and the brother selling his own sister. If you turn to the false prophet, Mahomet, you find him saying: "Whoso among you hath not means sufficient that he may marry free women who are believers, let him marry with such of your maidservants whom your right hands possess, as are true believers. . . . Ye are the one from the other; therefore marry them with the consent of their masters, and give them their dower according to justice" (Koran, chap. iv.). And again: "And unto such of your slaves as desire a written instrument allowing them to redeem themselves on paying a certain sum, write one if ye know good in them; and give them of the riches of God, which he hath given you. And compel not your maidservants to prostitute themselves, if they be willing to live chastely" (Ibid, chap. xxiv.). This is not Christian teaching, but it is the teaching of the heretic; but I will ask you to contrast that with the teaching you will find in the Book of Exodus. You will find there that a man may sell his own daughter, and that having taken a wife from those who may have been taken captive, he may, if it suits him, send her away if he does not care for her any longer. And then you find Moses saying that the slave is the owner's "money." There is a striking resemblance between the teaching of Moses and the practice in Christian lands; but it is alleged by Mr. Hatchard that it was Christian feeling and Christian teaching which opposed slavery in the Southern States of America. That is rather a rash statement to make in a hall which is filled with those who know that Christians were opponents of the abolition of slavery, and are acquainted with the general testimony which comes to us from all directions. I take a quotation from an admirable article lately written for the *N. R.* by one of our vice-presidents, Mr. Symes: "The Charleston Union Presbytery, 7th April, 1836, 'Resolved, that in the opinion of this Presbytery, the holding of slaves, so far from being a sin in the sight of God, is nowhere condemned in his holy word: that it is in accordance with the example and consistent with the precepts of patriarchs, apostles and prophets,' etc. The Missionary Society of the South Carolina Conference of



the Methodist Episcopal Church, by their board of managers, said: 'We denounce the principles and practice of the abolitionists *in toto*. . . . We believe that the holy scriptures, so far from giving any countenance to this delusion, do, unequivocally, authorise the relation of master and slave.' The Hopewell Presbytery, South Carolina, said: 'Slavery has always existed in the Church of God, from the time of Abraham to this day.'" This I admit to be true. "The Presbyterian Synod of Virginia 'Resolved, unanimously, that we consider the dogma, that slavery as it exists in the slave-holding States is necessarily sinful, and ought to be immediately abolished, and the conclusions which naturally follow from that dogma, as directly and palpably contrary to the plainest principles of common sense and common humanity, and the clearest authority of the word of God.'" That was the view, not of individuals, but of the Churches in America, when the slavery question was in agitation; and I will ask you to remember one terrible proof of the Christian opposition to all those who argued for slave abolition. The name of William Lloyd Garrison is identified with the struggle against slavery. Remember how he went to Boston and found that every church there closed its doors against him, how he could find no place to speak in, until the pulpit of Theodore Parker was opened to him, Theodore Parker who had been expelled even from the Unitarian body for the rank heresy which he thought it his duty to preach. (Applause.) I urge Mr. Hatchard to be good enough to give us some proofs of the statements he has made, to point out to us the resolutions of one church or of one sect tending to show us that the Christians were foremost in the trial to get abolition, to show that they preached abolition from their pulpits, when to preach it involved danger of life. I know that they joined in afterwards, when the battle was over and won. (Applause and laughter.) I will ask you to remember that the opposition to Clarkson's Bill came chiefly from the Christians in the House of Commons and the House of Lords, and that Lord Chancellor Thurlow, speaking from the woolsack, stigmatised it as a "miserable and contemptible Bill," and as utterly "contrary to the word of God." These are quotations which can easily be verified, and I will ask my opponent, when he next rises, to explain how, with this evidence before him, he can

say that Christians were in favor of the abolition of the slave trade. I submit to him that this is absolutely unsupported by any kind of evidence, and is directly negatived by what I have laid before him. Remembering the general mildness of Greek and Roman slavery, remembering how slaves were the teachers of the young, and how freedmen often rose to places of honor and of dignity, I allege "*That Christianity has upheld and aggravated slavery.*" (Loud applause.) We now come to the curious statement which my opponent makes to us that Christianity is consonant with science; and I propose here to put the argument in the hands of a very capable writer, one of whose works I will bring before you. I notice that my opponent the other night, in his last speech to which I had no right of reply, laid very great stress upon German authority; but that, in pity for our ignorance, he refrained from quoting a single German writer to us. I will ask your patience for a moment, because I think it as well to meet the challenge. I will read a passage of Strauss, so that we may see whether he, a representative German Freethinker, shares Mr. Hatchard's opinion with respect to Christianity and science being in harmony with each other. I have here a German edition of a work by Strauss, and I propose to read the extract in German, asking your pardon for doing so. Strauss deals with Christianity and science in a very interesting way, and it is an extract from him by which I will answer this part of my opponent's speech. The title of the book from which the quotation is given is "*Der alte und der neue Glaube.*" "*Den Hauptwiderspruch mußte die Stellung erregen, die sie der Erschaffung der Himmelskörper gab. Diese kommen bei ihr in jedem Betrachte zu spät. Die Sonne wird erst am vierten Tage geschaffen, nachdem bereits drei Tage lang der Wechsel von Tag und Nacht, der ohne die Sonne nicht denkbar ist, stattgefunden haben soll. Ferner wird die Erde mehrere Tage vor der Sonne geschaffen, und dieser wie dem Monde nur eine dienende Beziehung zur Erde gegeben, der Sterne aber nur ganz nebenher gedacht. Eine Verkehrung der wahren Rangverhältnisse unter den Weltkörpern, die einem geoffenbarten Berichte schlecht anstand.*" (Laughter and applause.) I have a word to say about one part of my opponent's speech which was most startling. He told us that, in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the language was so bad that he would not defile your ears by reading it to you. I would ask Mr.

Hatchard to remember that these words are read in the churches when the first chapter of Romans happens to be the lesson for the day, unless, indeed, the clergyman be better than his creed, and feels that he ought not to read it before decent men and women. Does not my opponent know that there are passages in the Bible infinitely worse than this chapter which he refuses to read before you on account of its language? Does he not put this Bible into the hands of little children, though he will not read it before grown men and people to whom the world has taught the knowledge of evil? Not read the New Testament aloud before women because of its foulness! But oh Sir (turning to Mr. Hatchard), that I would not defile my little daughter's ears with this foulness was one of the charges against me when your creed took away from me my child. (Loud and continued applause, mingled with cries of "bravo," during which Mrs. Besant resumed her seat.)

MR. HATCHARD: Mr. Chairman, Ladies, and Gentlemen, before I go on with some of the remarks which Mrs. Besant has made, I wish to say distinctly that we both came to discuss the influence of Christianity, and as far as I am concerned I have distinctly kept to the subject. ("Oh, oh," and laughter.) I say that I have not wasted a word from the subject, nor wandered a word, because I know this subject moderately well. I did not come here to discuss the Old Testament—I came here to discuss Jesus Christ, and his teaching and his influence on the world. I know perfectly well that it is a very cheap argument, indeed, about what is related in the books of Moses about slavery; but I want to see the same thing in the New Testament. I find nothing in the teaching of the New Testament about this treatment of these slaves, about the women and such-like. I have cut off that part of the argument—(laughter and interruption.)

THE CHAIRMAN: I shall be obliged if our friends will remain perfectly quiet, except so far as they may applaud during Mr. Hatchard's speech.

MR. HATCHARD: I did not come here to discuss slavery, and I allege most distinctly that it has nothing to do with the subject of the influence of Christianity upon the world. It would take me too long to give you the evidence—chapter and verse—how Christianity did ameliorate the world. But

down to the time of Constantine—roughly 300 years—it was Christian sentiment and Christian teaching that taught the doctrine of Christian brotherhood, that put down the slavery that existed in the ancient world. With regard to what Mrs. Besant has told you about persecution, the unfortunate thing is that I agree with every word she says ; and if I had to come out on this platform to lecture on what has been called Christianity in the world, I should say the same thing as Mrs. Besant. I say when, not only the Romish Church, but the Protestant Church likewise, persecuted and burnt people at the stake, or did all the other awful things which we read about in history, that they were not acting upon Christian principles in any sense whatever. They were acting in the same intolerant way that an ancient heathen nation acted when they compelled Socrates, as you have so often heard, to put himself to death. I find that all sects and parties have in their turn persecuted those that opposed them. I find a most extraordinary history of persecution with regard to Protestantism. I find that Elizabeth burnt a large number of Catholics, and I find that Mary persecuted a large number of Protestants. When I go to India I find a similar display of intolerance. Why did not the Brahmins let the followers of Buddha alone in India ? How comes it that they persecuted each other ? Why, ladies and gentlemen, the story ought to be well known to you. It was because of the persecuting spirit of the Brahmins who could not tolerate the free spirit of the Buddhists, because the Buddhists opposed the followers of Brahma the Buddhists were driven out and persecuted most fearfully. I say most distinctly—and let this be my answer in full, whether you think it is a good answer or not—when the Christian Church was guilty of persecuting various persons and burnt them at the stake, that it was not acting upon Christian principles—it was not acting upon the principles of the New Testament. Lest you should go away from here to-night without hearing the truth let me hasten on. I told you that I had here in my hands these testimonies by various great Indian authorities. These men are witnesses—witnesses to the truth. I know Sir Bartle Frere does not meet the approbation of some people ; but I tell you most distinctly that as an officer of the Government he is a competent witness to what has been done——(interruption).

The CHAIRMAN: If any interruption is offered I shall allow Mr. Hatchard time for it.

Mr. HATCHARD (resuming): Thank you! Mr. Bradlaugh is certainly one of the fairest chairmen I ever met. These men are competent witnesses of what takes place under their own cognisance and their own observation. But you will say "after all, these testimonies are only the testimonies of single men;" but, ladies and gentlemen (holding up a Blue Book), I have brought you a document which nobody can challenge. Our chairman knows what that is. (Much laughter and some applause.) These—I have two of them here. (Renewed laughter). I wish to read this with all the earnestness that my strength will allow me. This one was broken like this for a printer—but, friends, I hold here a Blue Book. The covers are gone. It is called, "Statement respecting the Moral and Material Progress of India during the year 1871-2." I have here the next volume, I believe, showing the progress of India morally and materially during 1873. These are, of course, official books, and I take the trouble to get these in order that I may show that my statements can be supported by indisputable evidence. I find here one, two, three, four, five pages with respect to the progress of Missions—Christian Missions in India, and what they have done; and I may tell you that the Church Missionary Society had these reprinted to take about the country to read to the people. I only have time to read briefly, so to speak, an extract, the last extract. It is called "General Influence of Missionary Teaching." This is not the word of a missionary deputation; it is not the word of a single official governor; it is the word of the Official Report in the Blue Book, and it says this. Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to remember these words: "But the Missionaries in India hold the opinion that the winning of these converts, whether in the cities or in the open country, is but a small portion of the beneficial results which have sprung from their labors. No statistics can give a fair view of all that they have done. They consider that their distinctive teaching, now applied to the country for many years, has powerfully affected the entire population. The moral tone of their preaching is recognised and highly approved by multitudes who do not follow them as converts. The various lessons which they inculcate have given to the people at

large new ideas, not only on purely religious questions, but on the nature of evil, the obligations of law, and the motives by which human conduct should be regulated. Insensibly a higher standard of moral conduct is becoming familiar to the people, especially to the young, which has been set before them not merely by public teaching, but by the millions of printed books and tracts which are scattered widely through the country." Christianity they tell us is opposed to education and knowledge! "On this account they express no wonder that the ancient systems are no longer defended as they once were; many doubts are felt about the rules of caste; the great festivals are not attended by the vast crowds of former years; and several Theistic schools have been growing up among the more educated classes, especially in the Presidency cities, who profess to have no faith in the idol-gods of their fathers." Now, there is much more that I might have read, and if I might be allowed to publish it in the *National Reformer*, I should like to do so. Now, perhaps you would like to see what things were in India before the introduction of Christianity. I think I have about three minutes left, and I will show you some pictures I have brought with me of the gods they used to worship in India. That (showing the first of a series of large colored diagrams fixed at the back of the platform)—that is one of the idols—that is Siva.

A VOICE: Will you bring them to the front, if you please?

The CHAIRMAN: Please don't interrupt. You can see well enough.

Mr. HATCHARD: That represents Kali or Durga. She has a thousand names, and it used to be that human sacrifices were constantly offered to her. It would take me a full night to tell you of the horrors of the worship of that most horrible and disgusting goddess. That is one of the old things which has been put down. There you have what is called the Swing Festival, and I tell you here to-night that the Swing Festival—one of the most horrible things—has almost entirely died out because of what Christianity has taught. Here is another thing, the Exposing of Infants by the banks of the Ganges. That is dying out. Here you have the Festival of Juggernaut, and I stand here to-night to tell

you that this festival, which used to be attended by say 250,000 Hindus, has now only about 10,000. I cannot tell you all that Christianity has done in India during the last eighty years. Is it dead? Here is another picture. Here you have the burning of the Indian widow. Was it not Christianity and Christian sentiment which put that down? and you know how deeply rooted it was in the Indian mind. The testimony with regard to what Christianity has done in India in effecting a moral change, a moral alteration, a moral revolution, is something alarming. I have testimonies in this book ("Indian Missionary Manual," 1870, John Murdoch,) which are enough to convince anybody. I say distinctly, what I have told you about the moral progress in India, the alteration in the public mind, has been brought about by Christian teaching and Christian preaching in the land. The late Miss Mary Carpenter was a friend of mine, and she, and I, and Sir Mutu Coomaru Swamy with some other friends, established a "National Indian Association" in Manchester some years ago, to make known in this country what was being done in India. You say, perhaps, that you don't take my word for it; but I can bring forward chapter and verse to prove all that I have told you. Well, then, you have seen what I have tried to do to-night. I have tried to show a parallel between these two things: What Christianity effected morally in the Roman Empire during the first 300 years down to the time of Constantine, and What Christianity has effected in India in the last seventy or eighty years. (Applause.)

Mrs. BESANT: I understand that Mr. Hatchard is not prepared to defend the Old Testament. Of that I am glad, although it is strange that a Christian clergyman should say so, for I find in the New Testament that Christ laid it down that anyone who should break the least of these commandments of Moses, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; and while I find Christ altering some of them, and saying that it was said "by them of old time" do so and so, "but I say unto you," do something else, yet he never said: "It was said by them of old time, you may flay your slaves nearly to death, but I say unto you, set them free." If slavery in the old world was as abominable as Mr. Hatchard has said, that makes the conduct of the Apostle Paul in sending back the fugitive slave to his master worse than I

have pictured it, where slaves were constantly the instructors of the young, and where freed slaves rose to the highest positions in the polity of the Roman Empire. Mr. Hatchard says that India is totally different now from what it was when we took it. I am sorry to say that I admit that contention, although I do not think it will help his argument very much. I may say in explanation of the groans with which the name of Sir Bartle Frere was greeted that he is regarded here as a man who has done more harm and shed more blood than any living man. And when I am told of the few lives rescued from the car of Juggernaut I wonder how many thousand people have been offered up as sacrifices to the War-God to please Sir Bartle Frere. The change is indeed alarming since Christianity first made its way into India. Before then the natives "had reared cities larger and fairer than Saragossa or Toledo, and buildings more beautiful and costly than the Cathedral of Seville. They could show bankers richer than the richest firms of Barcelona or Cadiz; viceroys whose splendor far surpassed that of Ferdinand the Catholic; myriads of cavalry and long trains of artillery which would have astonished the Great Captain" (Macaulay's Essays p. 502). Instead of persecution, as put by Mr. Hatchard, Mr. Torrens draws the following picture: "Neither Moslem nor Hindu was incapacitated for public employment on account of the belief in which he had been brought up. Mahomedan princes gladly confided to learned and astute Brahmins civil trusts of importance; and many a Mussulman rose to honor and won fortune in a Maharajah's camp. . . . The governments of Southern Asia, when we began to meddle in their affairs, were strangers to the system of penal laws, which were then among the cherished institutions of our own and nearly every other European State. While no Catholic in Ireland could inherit freehold, command a regiment, or sit on the judicial bench; while in France the Huguenot weaver was driven into exile beyond the sea; and while in Sweden none but Lutherans could sit as jurors, and in Spain no heretic was permitted Christian burial—Sunis and Sheahs, Mahrattas and Sikhs, competed freely for distinction and profit in almost every city and camp of Hindustan" (Torrens' "Empire in Asia"). In order to strengthen that, I read again in the *Quarterly Review*—



“Philip IV. and our own Elizabeth were the contemporaries of Akber; and while Europe was convulsed and desolated with the wars which arose out of the Reformation, India reposed in unexampled prosperity under the tolerant sway of her Mussulman autocrat. While Philip was extinguishing the last embers of industry and commerce in Spain, by the unremitting persecution of Morisco, Jew and heretic, and waging the most sanguinary warfare against the civil and religious liberties of the Low Countries, Akber was endeavoring to blend, under one peaceful and equitable government, the discordant elements of the vast Indian population” (Vol. lxviii.). We have not only introduced Christianity, but we have driven the people to a misery that they never knew in the old days. Hear the words of Mr. Phillimore: “There is no spot of the earth where all that is necessary for the support of its inhabitants is raised with more facility. . . . Spices, grain, indigo, sandal-wood, opium, pepper, vegetables and fruit are equally abundant. Sugar, though it requires more labor, can be raised with the same success. The cattle, though small and yielding little milk, more than compensate by their numbers for their want of strength. Fish swarm in the rivers, the woods are full of game. . . . When we seized upon this land, the overflowing of its soil fed distant regions” (“History of England during the Reign of George III., vol. i.). [The quotations were read from “England, India and Afghanistan.”] Now these people die of starvation by hundreds and by thousands. Christianity has indeed progressed to a remarkable and alarming extent. But I am told that the persecutions I allege are the effect of *what is called* Christianity, and not of *true* Christianity. I can only judge the tree by its fruits. I only know that every Christian Church did persecute; there was nothing to choose between one and another; and I say that wherever you get religion there you get persecution; wherever you get religion sincere, there you will have persecution. Persecution is less to-day, because Freethought is so widely spread that even Christians themselves are not sure of the eternal damnation of the heretic, and they do not like to burn him. But the suttee is abolished we are told. The suttee has been very much exaggerated; Abbè Dubois has told us that out of a population of thirty millions only about thirty widows a-year committed

suicide in that way. But I ask are there not in every Christian country more suicides in one single month than you find in a year by this Indian suttee? I put one other point. Mr. Hatchard admits that other religions have gone wrong, and I agree with him. Christianity, however, claims to be what no other religion is, the revelation of an almighty god, and I urge that it is no excuse for its errors to say that it has done no worse than the other religions of the world have done. It will be my duty in my last speech to sum up the various points which my opponent has not dealt with, but I should like him to deal with that remarkable argument from Strauss which I read to him. My 5th allegation is *that Christianity has not succeeded in purifying morals*, that it has not insured their purity. I am glad however to be able to say that the Christian scriptures are not, on the whole, as bad as Christian practice; the New Testament, at least, does not teach gross vice, although very faulty morality, but the influence of Christianity has not insured purification of morals. I know that it is urged that although Greece and Rome were great intellectually, they were very bad morally; could not exactly the same be said of Paris and London to-day? It is not enough to say that they were bad, unless you can prove that you have made things better. Christianity has utterly failed to improve upon the morality of Paganism on most points, and while it sinks far below it in intellect it does not rise above it in morals. I admit that in Plato's Republic there is a community of women, a thing of which I utterly disapprove. But I might very fairly urge that there is plenty of authority in the Bible for the foulest polygamy. Let us see the condition of society after 400 years of Christianity. Salvian, a Christian minister, writes: "Who is there who is not rolling in the mire of fornication? And what more? What I am about to state is grave and mournful. The very Church of God, which ought in all things to please God, what does it but provoke Him to anger? With the exception of a *very few*, who fly from vice, what is almost every Christian congregation, but a sink of vices? For you will find in the church scarcely one who is not either a drunkard, or a glutton, or an adulterer, or a fornicator, or a ravisher, or a robber, or a manslayer, and, what is worse than all, almost all these without limit.

I put it now to the conscience of all Christian people, whether it be not so that you will barely find one who is not addicted to some of the vices and crimes I have mentioned; or rather, who is it that is not guilty of all? Truly you will more easily find the man who is guilty of all than one who is guilty of none" (Miall's "Memorials of early Christianity," pp. 366-367). That is the purity of morals which was insured by Christianity after four centuries of work. It is extremely useful to us that Christians have quarrelled as much as they have, for it is from the mouth of a Christian who wants to do away with Episcopacy and to prove that the early Church was not perfect that I am able to bring you this very valuable testimony on my side of the argument. Again, let us see what Mosheim says of the third century: "Many were sunk in luxury and voluptuousness, puffed up with vanity, arrogance, and ambition, possessed with a spirit of contention and discord, and addicted to many other vices" [p. 73]. That is the Christian historian on the Church even in the third century. And shall I not find in the Middle Ages that vice was literally everywhere? Shall I not find, if I want to discover the very worst characters, I must go to the centre of the Christian Church, to Rome under the rule of the Popes? Shall I not find that the priests encourage the people to commit crime by the sale of indulgences, by virtue of which they could do whatever their passions led them to do with impunity? Shall I not find that the first movement towards a purer morality came from those very heretics whom they put to death? There was no difficulty in the way of the sin, because there was no difficulty in the way of the forgiveness; and the Christian doctrine of the New Testament has entirely destroyed the chance of stopping sin. By the gifts of the sinners the Church grew wealthy. Every day brought riches to them. You find that the riches of the Church are made up by the riches which came from the death-bed when men tried to buy their way to heaven. The Roman Catholic opened heaven's gate with a golden key; later, the Protestant used the key of the blood of Christ, to be had for the asking; and so you find that Christianity did not insure purity of morals, because it did not teach that crime was unpardonable, because it taught that however wrongly you acted you might easily

escape punishment from God by giving something to his priests before your last hour came. (Applause.)

MR. HATCHARD: Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, Mrs. Besant has thrown out some very bold challenges. I proceed as briefly as I can to answer one or two of them. She has drawn you a very black picture, indeed, of what the Church was in what I call the middle ages. But the unfortunate thing is that I perfectly agree with her, because I was taught the same thing in a Theological College. Let me ask you another question. During the dark ages, as they are called, when the people were many of them very profligate, and I regret to say that many of the clergy were not much better—(laughter)—I say, where were the scriptures, and where was the New Testament? I do ask you most distinctly to carefully read over some good ecclesiastical history. There are a great many small histories which you can easily buy, if you do not care to read the large work of Mosheim, as Mrs. Besant has done. You will find this unless I am greatly mistaken. As the ages rolled on from the time of Christ, say to that of Constantine—take the year 325, the Council of Nice—gradually it appears to me that the Bible was laid aside, the people were very little acquainted with it, and we, to-day, cannot understand the ignorance of the clergy of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The truth is, that when Martin Luther found the Bible, and read it, it was like a revelation to him. The New Testament, as far as the intelligence of the people was concerned, was non-existent. Now, therefore, it appears to me that true religion—such as read in the New Testament—that true religion gradually declined during the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, and so on, over a large part of Europe. Curiously enough, learning died out in Europe in the same way. With the rise of Christianity in the earliest times there was a new school of Greek learning; but, as the ages rolled on, curiously enough true religion died out: I freely admit it; and gradually it seems that learning died out as well; and curiously enough again at the Reformation they came back at the same time; at least, that is my version of it. I have here "The Life of Leo X." I learn here that learning and true religion—that is New Testament religion—came in together. I am surprised that Mrs. Besant brought in the Epistle of Paul to Philemon. What do I

find here? I read in the sixteenth verse, with regard to sending this slave or servant back again I read these words: "Receive him not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee." This man, the poor, broken-down slave, who fled to the Apostle Paul for refuge, was sent back to his master, not simply as a slave to be crushed and beaten and trodden down, but as a beloved brother to be treated well, honestly, and kindly. (Applause). I hold in my hands a book which I dare say Mrs. Besant knows well, "The Education of the Human Race," by Lessing. Of course I don't put Lessing forward as orthodox by any means whatever. Lessing has been discussing the education of the world and the various systems of the world. I hold myself that the human race has been educated—educated in the same way as you educate a child, and Lessing here says: "A better Instructor must come and tear the exhausted Primer from the child's hands. Christ came! That portion of the human race which God had willed to comprehend in one Educational plan, was ripe for the second step of Education. He had, however, only willed to comprehend on such a plan, one which by language, mode of action, government, and other natural and political relationships, was already united in itself." ("Education of the Human Race," pp. 46—47, ed. 1858). And then he goes on to discuss Christianity. My version of it is this, that the world in various ways, by modes of government, by systems of philosophy or science so-called, educated itself up to a certain point. Christ came into the world, and when he came he made a moral change, or rather, the beginning of a change; because Christianity has not effected a violent revolution in the world and a violent change. I am not afraid of any comparison between Jesus of Nazareth and Buddha. It is only those who don't know about Jesus and about Budda who are afraid. I will come here some night and show you the difference and the relation. (Laughter.) Jesus of Nazareth left his words upon the world in the minds of his disciples to produce fruit. In the early ages they did produce this fruit. Then, unfortunately for the world, the world disregarded them, till by-and-bye, at the time of the Reformation, Martin Luther arose. There was John Wicliff, Jerome of Prague, and others, who helped the Reformation forward; and by-and-

bye there comes Martin Luther, and he was followed by a great number, as you well know, throughout Germany and throughout Europe. Perhaps, with the exception of Russia, you had this New Testament—the words of Jesus of Nazareth—again brought to the front, which our friend Strauss, in his “Life of Jesus” (of which I make Mrs. Besant a present), tried curiously enough to upset, but failed. Strauss was driven away completely out of the field by Neander and such-like writers. There is hardly a single thing which Strauss has put forward that even the very Freethinkers of to-day have not given up. I say that Strauss as a power has died out. I made it my business to inquire from one of the best German houses, a publishing firm, as to what was the influence of Strauss in Germany now. They told me that Strauss was practically dead, that only those who put forward Strauss-and-water—*ie.*, Strauss disguised, had any influence with the public. I proved to you beyond dispute and against the cavil of all the Freethinkers in Europe, Strauss included, that Jesus of Nazareth, the Jesus of the Gospels, actually lived as a historical character; that the Gospels and Epistles are substantially a true account of what he said and did; and in consequence of the teaching of the early Christian teachers, that Christian churches were established in the East certainly and in a large part of the Roman Empire. By the teaching of these disciples and Christian teachers a great moral change was effected. Now then, I say most distinctly, and I wish you not to go away from this place and forget it, that I don’t stand here to-night to defend persecution. I also say distinctly I know some little of what such men as Professors Huxley and Tyndall put before the public, and I have yet to learn that there is any real contradictions between the highest science as taught by these men and Christianity as taught in the New Testament. (A voice, “Keep to the point.”) I am to the point, Sir; much too near to the point to suit you. Mrs. Besant is, I have no doubt, sincere in the view she has taken of Christianity, and which she has published to the world in her book and various writings. But I say she has drawn you one picture to night—the picture which you Freethinkers most like to hear; but I stand here to paint the other picture—that there is no real contradiction between the highest science as taught in the present day and

true religion as taught in the New Testament. I deny emphatically that the highest intellects are against religion. I ask who is Professor Owen? Who is Dr. Carpenter of the London University? Dr. Carpenter believes as much as I believe in the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth, and also that Jesus of Nazareth was the teacher which I put before you last week. Ladies and Gentlemen, answer me this if you can. You Freethinkers ("Oh, oh!" laughter and groans,) are indebted to Christian scholars for the very knowledge that you have of the Bible, and of its past history in Europe during the last eighteen centuries; and it is out of the armory of Christianity that you have got the weapons that you have turned against me. (Applause.)

Mrs. BESANT: It is my duty to sum up the results of this debate so far as they appear to touch the question, to point out the arguments which my opponent has omitted to notice, and, lastly, to put before you a brief sketch of what the world was before Christianity, what the world became under Christianity, and what the world is to-day. I must first remark that my challenge touching Strauss has remained entirely unanswered. Not only has my opponent failed to answer the argument drawn from Strauss, but he has even mistaken the very book used. He has jumped to the conclusion that I was using Strauss's best known work, the "Leben Jesu," although I twice gave the title of the book really used. In the quotation read, Strauss points out the utter disagreement between the Mosaic account of the creation and the facts known to science. But my opponent says that Strauss is not now read in Germany; well, the book is in its sixth edition, and that is pretty good for an unread man. My reason for using Strauss will have been very obvious to you. My opponent, in a way which was scarcely courteous either to the audience or to myself, sneered at us as ignorant of German, and said that he could have overpowered us with German authorities, but did not, as we should know nothing about them. So I thought I would test his own knowledge of German, and I am inclined to think that the result is hardly satisfactory. (Loud laughter and cheers.) Now for the missionaries and their work. Major-General Stuart, in a book I have here, implores the Government to stop them, on the ground that they are undermining our rule in India and are rendering revolt

probable. As to their moral influence, listen to the words put into the mouth of a Hindu by Abbé Dubois: "You speak of morality, and of purity of manners, and you boast of a great superiority over me in these respects. But pray, how comes it that from the very accounts you are not ashamed to publish even in this my supposed thoroughly corrupted country, it appears that in each of your respective metropolises, London and Paris, you reckon no less than forty thousand prostitutes? . . . You speak in high terms of your civilisation, of your refined education and manners, but how comes it that amidst the advantages you claim over me in these respects, crimes and vices of every kind are more prevalent in your countries than in mine. From whence comes it that, with the superior education and civilisation you boast of, your cities and towns are filled with thieves, sharpers, pickpockets, swindlers, gamblers, forgers, false coiners, and other knaves of every description, most of them happily unknown in my supposed thoroughly corrupted country?" But we are told, Dr. Owen and Dr. Carpenter are Christians. I do not know if Dr. Owen be a Christian; if so, it may explain his taking the wrong side on Evolution. But Dr. Carpenter no more believes in the Deity of Christ than I do; he is a Unitarian, and it is not fair to bring forward in defence of orthodoxy a man who is three-parts a heretic. Mr. Hatchard admits that Christianity brought forward no new intellectual truths, and he has not denied—indeed, he could not—the ignorance which reigned while Christianity was supreme, so my first proposition stands. Christianity took hundreds of years before it tried to abolish slavery. Mr. Hatchard asserted that it abolished it in the Southern States of America. I gave three important authorities in contradiction, and though Mr. Hatchard has spoken twice since he has not given one authority in support of his statement, so that, as regards slavery, you have Mr. Hatchard's bare assertion on one side and all the facts on the other. (Applause.) The persecution on the part of the churches is admitted; in the face of history it could not be denied. Has not the influence of Christianity on the world tended to horrible persecution? But we are told that Christianity was practically dead during the Middle Ages, and revived at the Reformation, when Christianity and learning came back together. But if



so Christianity died when it was wanted and came back when it was superfluous. But, says Mr. Hatchard, the human race was educated like a child. Is that so? are the laws of Moses fit for a child to follow, or even to read? Are these cruel, persecuting, bloodthirsty laws the laws by which god educated his creature man? Why, the worst father or mother among you would not train their children as god is said to have trained his. Friends, I urge to you that Mr. Hatchard has utterly failed to prove his own position and that he has left my points absolutely unshaken. (Applause.) The only place wherein he even tried to show that Christianity had been useful was in India, and here he did not touch the terrible evidence I gave you on the other side. So much for the debate. Now for a general review of the influence of Christianity on the world. Carry back your minds to the old days, long, long before the birth of Christ. Come with me to India, and see the wise men studying astronomy, mapping the heavens, recording the motions of the stars. Come to Egypt, and see the learned there gazing at the starry worlds around them, climbing to a knowledge which Christendom afterwards destroyed. Come from the East, come from India and from Egypt into Europe, and stay awhile in Greece. Remember Greece in the days of the paganism, in the days of her glory. Vicious? aye, but Christendom had the vices, but where had it the magnificent intellect which Greece and Rome gave to the world? (Applause.) I would ask you now, friends, not to cheer me, for I have much to say and brief time for speech. Wait in Greece and look around you. See the canvas glow under the pencil of Apelles. See the marble grow to life under the chisel of Phidias. Art was beautiful, and lent her grace to life, and hand in hand with Art went Science, her sister. Philosophy rose in the writings of Democritus and Epicurus. The golden groves of Athens were musical with the voice of Socrates, with the teachings of Plato; mathematics found such mastery in Euclid that you send your children to school to-day at the feet of the old Pagan. Greece gave birth to the drama. Tragedy rose to her most majestic expression, comedy found the mirthfullest utterance, for art was there as many sided as nature. And the sterner sciences had too their place; physical science was cultivated, nature was questioned, natural philo-

sophy was built up. And all this without Christianity. Science grew, and life was beautiful. The very idolatry had its beauty, for it worshipped the natural. But Christianity was born, and instead of the glow and the glory of paganism, the "world grew grey at the breath" of the Galilean. Pass from Greece to Rome. Cicero is to-day the model of the purest eloquence. Statesmen go to school to these old teachers, who were Pagan and not Christian in their thought, and learn from them the stately eloquence which they use to sway the nations. Such were the might, the glory, and the beauty of Pagan Greece and Rome. And now Christianity is born—born in Judæa among an ignorant and a barbarous people. Christ comes with words of love on his lips and a destroying sword in his hand. See the cross is in the hand of his servant the Church, and she goes among the poor, and her influence spreads until she climbs the throne of the Cæsars. And now she bears the crucifix in one hand and the sword in the other, and she reigns from the imperial throne. The crucifix is her symbol, and look at it well. A dead man hangs on the cross, turning men's thoughts to death instead of to life. See from his riven side flow water and blood, water for the tears that shall be shed for his sake, blood for the lives that shall be spilled in his name. See how she walks over Europe, the cross in her hand. The land is as the garden of Eden before her, but behind her a desolate wilderness. The arts decay; the schools disappear; all knowledge is withered at the breath of the Church. Intellectual death everywhere meets our eyes. Gloom and darkness envelope Christendom, darkness only lightened up by the lurid flames from the stake where the heretic is burning, and yet more lurid flame of the hell beyond the grave. But see, there is a gleam of light breaking through the blackness of the sky. It comes from Spain, where the followers of the false prophet are. Science is born, new born to bless the earth. But round the cradle of the infant Hercules gather the serpents of the Church, they hiss, and bite, and struggle; their fangs are the dungeon and the stake, and the child is in sore peril of life, but he fights and catches the hydra necks and strangles them, and the serpents no longer can bite. Yet the struggle is not over; it continues even till to-day. The crucifix is stricken to the earth, the sword is broken and

dashed from the hands of the Church. It can no longer touch the body, it can only cramp the soul. But we will free the souls of men as we have freed their bodies. Instead of religion we will give them science. Instead of heaven we will give them earth. Instead of credulity we will give them knowledge. Instead of fear we will give them love. Love on the earth which Christianity has darkened instead of fear of the hell which the churches have dreamed. We raise a nobler temple and we bring a grander creed. Our morality is based on experience not on revelation, on man's needs not on god's command. Thus at length shall the world regain its old beauty, and it shall be beautiful because it shall be consecrated to man, and shall no longer be darkened because it belongs to god.

Mrs. Besant resumed her seat amid tremendous applause, accompanied by the waving of hats and handkerchiefs and shouts of "Bravo!" which continued for some minutes.

When silence was at length restored the Rev. A. Hatchard rose and said :—I trust you will have the courtesy of Englishmen on my motion to accord to Mr. Bradlaugh a hearty vote of thanks for his taking the chair here to-night. It is the first time I have been present on this platform before you, but I trust it will not be the last. I sincerely hope that Mrs. Besant and myself will meet again under similar circumstances in the early part of the coming year. There are one or two points to which I should like to refer——

The CHAIRMAN here rose and intimated that this could not be allowed.

Mr. HATCHARD (to the Chairman): May I just say one word respecting Strauss?

The CHAIRMAN: I say that I must stop anything but the mere motion.

Mr. HATCHARD then moved a vote of thanks to the Chairman which was seconded and put by Mrs. Besant, and carried unanimously with loud applause.

The CHAIRMAN briefly responded, thanking the audience for the attention paid on both nights, and declared the meeting closed.

# GIORDANO BRUNO

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BY ANNIE BESANT.

"Who was Bruno?" is a question now heard so often, that a brief answer to it may prove acceptable to those of our readers who know nothing of this grandest hero of Freethought, this man who lived and died so nobly that he carved his name for ever on the marble temple of Fame. Crowned he was, in days gone by, by the fiery rays of the martyr's pyre; crowned he is, in the day of the present, by the sunny rays of a people's homage—that people who, gathered out of every clime, are the forerunners of the "nation that shall be," the Freethinkers of every country, the vanguard of Liberty's army. Long has his name "lived in our ranks," and it is now echoing through the world outside—for in Rome, in the city where they slew him; in Rome, through whose streets they dragged him to his death; in Rome, where they scoffed at and jeered him; in Rome, where they triumphed over his dying agonies; in Rome itself he has arisen victorious, and Bruno's statue shall soon look down upon the spot where Bruno died. Round the base of that statue shall gather his own Italian people. In his own soft tongue shall Roman parents tell their children how Bruno taught and died. From Bruno's memory shall pour forth a flood of stronger inspiration than has yet swept over his land; and Italia's sons and daughters, emulous of his glory, shall carry on, farther than he could dream of, that standard of Free Thought and Free Speech which dropped from his charred hand into the fire of the Inquisition.

Giordano Bruno was born A.D. 1550, in Nola, a small town near Naples, midway between the Mediterranean and Vesuvius. This little city's name is one well known in history: "Hannibal failed more than once before its walls; Sylla encamped there; Augustus went there to die." The Goths took it, Alaric sacked it, the Saracens seized it; though only containing 10,000 inhabitants it was yet, in Bruno's time, an episcopal see. Nor is Bruno the only martyr given by Nola to Freethought, for another of her sons, Pomponio Algeri, was burned in Rome "for contempt of the faith and of the Christian religion," in the year 1555,

five years after Bruno's birth. Nothing is known with certainty respecting Bruno's family ; some say that he came of noble race, others that he sprang from the people. He grew up in troublous times, amid war and tumult, while convulsions of nature accompanied the convulsion of States ; "earthquakes, inundations, eruptions, famine, and pestilence ; in that troublous time the creation itself seemed to violate its own laws." Young Bruno, studious, eager for knowledge, impatient for learning, sought refuge in a monastery from the perpetual tumult of the world, and he clad himself in the garb of the Dominican. But not for long could the narrow trammels of the monastic life hold him captive. He says himself : "After having cultivated literature and poetry for a long time, my guides themselves, my superiors and my judges, led me to philosophy and to free inquiry." The free inquiry led to disbelief in some of the dogmas of Christianity ; the philosophy led to rejection of the supremacy of Aristotle. It is hard to say which result was then the most dangerous, for Aristotle had become the very pillar of the Church, and to attack Aristotle was to attack Christianity. It was apparently at this time that he issued a satire, entitled "Noah's Ark," which is now only known by Bruno's own allusions to it in his "*Cena delle Ceneri*," and which seems to have been an attack on the ignorance of the monkish orders. But his great crime in the eyes of his brethren was that, rejecting Aristotle, he strove to revive the earlier philosophy of Plato and Pythagoras ; and sitting at the feet of Pythagoras, who taught that the sun was the centre of the system of which our world was a part, and that the planets revolved round him, Bruno naturally upheld the then new theories of Copernicus (born about 1470, died 1543), and thus flung himself straight against the teaching of the Church. Italy became too dangerous for him, and he fled to Geneva in the year 1580. But Geneva, dominated by Calvin and Beza, had no welcome for this heretical philosopher who despised Aristotle, its citizens having already decreed, "for once and for ever, that neither in logic, nor in any other branch of learning, shall any one among them go astray from the opinions of Aristotle." So Bruno shook the city's dust from his feet, and passed on into France, visiting, on his way, Lyons and Toulouse. From Toulouse, where Vanini was tortured and burned thirty-six years later, he was obliged to flee for his life ; and he reached Paris in

safety, through what he terms "one long and vast tumult," in the year 1582. Arrived there, he petitioned the Sorbonne for permission to teach philosophy in public, and—stronghold of the Aristotelian philosophy as was Paris at that time—the permission was granted him, and he would have been admitted as a professor if he would have attended mass: this, however, Bruno would by no means do; and he was guarded from danger on this head by the protection accorded him by the King, Henry III., and by his personal popularity. The students of Paris were much attracted by the brilliant Italian, by "his ready wit and the Neapolitan warmth of his oratory. He improvised upon any subject with marvellous promptitude. Standing up, speaking as rapidly as the pen could write, dictating as quickly as his thought progressed, carried away by the enthusiasm of his age, which was fed by belief in his mission, he, in his turn, carried away all those who listened to him" ("Vie de Jordano Bruno," par C. Bartholmess, tome i., p. 81, ed. 1846, from which this sketch is mainly drawn).

Bruno remained, for about a year, teaching in Paris, and from thence went to London (A.D. 1583). Recommended by Henry III. to the French ambassador, Michel de Castelnau, Seigneur de Mauvissière, Bruno was at once introduced into the English Court, where he became closely intimate with Sir Philip Sydney, and was much favoured by Queen Elizabeth. His admiration for this Sovereign was intense; and he writes of her genius, her knowledge, and her wisdom in the most glowing terms. Bruno had scarcely reached London when he flung himself once more into controversy. The Earl of Leicester, being Chancellor of Oxford, presided at a grand festival given in honour of the Count Albert de Lasco, and the leading men of letters were gathered together at the University. Discussions were held on disputed points, and "all comers were challenged. Bruno stepped into the arena. Oxford chose her best men to combat for Aristotle and Ptolemy. On that cause her existence seemed to depend" (Lewes's "History of Philosophy," vol. ii., p. 98, ed. 1867). "'The earth is immovable, the universe is finite and moveable,' said the University, with Aristotle and Ptolemy. 'The earth revolves, and the universe is infinite,' said Bruno, relying on Philolaus and Copernicus" ("Vie.") The dispute grew warm, and Bruno, writing of it, claims to have silenced his antagonist fifteen times.

At Oxford Bruno again spoke from the professor's chair, and lectured on physical science—teaching the heliocentric theory and the infinity of worlds—and also on the immortality of the soul. He taught the “immutability of the substance that thinks and wills in us,” regarding it as part of the great whole. “Bruno admits the existence of only one intelligence, and that is God. This intelligence, which is perfect in God, is less perfect in inferior spirits; still less so in man; more and more imperfect in the lower gradations of created beings. But all these differences are differences of degree, not of kind. The inferior orders of beings do not understand themselves; but they have a sort of language. In the superior orders of beings intelligence arrives at the point of self-consciousness—they understand themselves, and those below them. Man, who occupies the middle position in the hierarchy of creation, is capable of contemplating every phasis of life. He sees God above him—he sees around him traces of the Divine activity. These traces, which attest the immutable order of the universe, constitute the soul of the world. To collect them, and connect them with the Being whence they issue, is the noblest function of the human mind. Bruno further teaches that, in proportion as man labours in this direction, he discovers that these traces, spread abroad in nature, do not differ from the *ideas* which exist in his own mind. He thus arrives at the perception of the identity between the soul of the world and his own soul, both as reflections of the Divine Intelligence” (“Lewes,” pp. 108, 109). “Bruno’s creed was Pantheism.....He taught that God was the Infinite Intelligence, the cause of causes, the Principle of all life and mind; the great Activity, whose action we name the universe. But God did not *create* the universe; he *informed* it with life—with being.” (Ibid, p. 107). Pantheism has been called “veiled Atheism,” and so thoroughly does Pantheism strike at the root of all idea of God, as taught by Theists, that we can scarce think that Bruno was unfairly judged when called Atheist by his contemporaries; the conception of the Pantheist cannot be called a God, in the commonly-accepted sense of that term. As though all this were not enough heresy for one man to teach in those days, Bruno explained that the Scripture should not be taken as authoritative on physical science, and he further followed the Lucretian atomic philosophy, and was Materialist as well as Pantheist

Bruno remained in England until 1585, or until early in 1586, employing much of his time in writing, and he was then obliged to fly once more before the opposition he aroused by his bold heresy. So he turned his steps again towards Paris, and there held his famous three-days' discussion, Pentecost, 1586.

The effect of this tournament was soon seen ; Bruno's heresy was as unwelcome in Paris as in Italy, in Geneva, in Oxford, and he fled to Germany, directing his steps to Marbourg, in Hesse, where a doctor's degree was conferred upon him in the July of the same year (1586). Spite of the doctor's degree, however, the Rector of the University refused to allow Bruno to teach philosophy, a refusal which so irritated Bruno that he angrily refused to remain a member of the University, and his name was accordingly erased.

From Marbourg Bruno went to Wittemberg (or Würtemberg), where, for a short while, he enjoyed security, and of the University there he ever spoke most gratefully. Honour to Wittemberg which sheltered the heretic—to the Germany which gave asylum to the Freethinker ; while Bruno's name lives this University shall be remembered ; among its many glories none shines with purer ray than this generous welcome given to the exile, this protection thrown round the proscribed of the Inquisition. Yet, surely, Bruno repaid the debt, since he shed on those who befriended him the light of his genius, and enchained them with the magic fetters of his golden tongue ; listen to this panegyric of Luther, warm with the passion of the South : " Who is that whose name I have hitherto passed over in silence ? The vicar of the tyrant of hell, at once fox and lion, armed with the keys and the sword, with cunning and strength, with subtlety and violence, with hypocrisy and ferocity, had infected the universe with a superstitious worship, and with an ignorance worse than brutal, hidden under the titles of divine wisdom, of simplicity agreeable to God. No one, nothing, dared to oppose this voracious monster, when a new Alcides arose to lead to a purer and happier state this unworthy age, this degraded Europe ; a Hercules greater than the first, in that he hath done grander deeds with lesser effort, in that he hath slain a monster more mighty, more dangerous, than all the terrors of the ages gone by. And whence cometh this hero, if not from Germany, from the flowering banks of the Elbe ? Here is it that this



Cerberus, this three-headed dog, with its triple tiara, hath been dragged from the darkness of Orcus, hath been forced to look at the sun, and to vomit its venom. Here is it that your Hercules hath triumphed over the diamond gates that close up hell, over the city guarded by three walls, and by the nine arms of the Styx. Thou hast seen the light, O Luther, thou hast gazed into it, thou hast heard the spirit of God which summoned thee; thou hast obeyed, thou hast run, without arms and feeble, to meet this terrible enemy of the great and of kings; thou hast fought with thy word, and, covered with spoils and with trophies, thou hast ascended to the skies."

Leaving Wittemberg, Bruno visited Prague, where the Emperor Rudolph II. was holding his court, and he presented to this Prince his CLX. Theses, against the mathematicians of the time; but the Emperor showed him no favour, so he turned his steps to the University of Helmstadt, where he was welcomed by the Duke of Brunswick, and was appointed tutor to the young Duke Henry, the heir to the Crown, in the year 1589. This honourable appointment came, however, speedily to an end, for the Duke died this same year, and was succeeded by his son; Bruno pronounced a pathetic funeral oration over the Prince who had befriended him, and then began, as ever, to teach his philosophical doctrines: he was soon excommunicated by the head of the clergy (October, 1589), but remained in Helmstadt until the following year. The opposition then grew too strong to face, and he departed to Frankfort in 1590, where he remained with a family of the name of Wechel, a member of which had been a friend of Sir Philip Sydney; here he wrote his last three works, one on logic, and two on metaphysics and cosmography; under his own direction the necessary pictures were engraved, and he finished correcting the last proof-sheets; after this he disappears from our gaze for a short while, until, in February, 1592, he comes into view again at Padua. Alas! why did he return to Italy after his ten years' labour? why did he, with his name ringing through Europe as heretic, walk straight into the lion-jaws of the Inquisition? Well might an old pupil of Helmstadt write: "What can bring that man to Italy, from whence he was forced to flee?" They say, some who write of him, that home-sickness took him there; that he wearied for his Italy, for the soft Southern tongue and the warm bright Southern skies. Be that as it may, Bruno's fate was

sealed when he crossed the Alps, and his short labours at Padua were the last of his noble life ; chased from that city he fled to Venice, and there the bloodhounds of the Inquisition ran him down at last : he was arrested and thrown into prison. At that same time Galileo came to Padua, and was appointed professor of mathematics ; for six years he held that post, and for those six years Giordano Bruno was buried in the Piombi in Venice ; six years, without book, or pen, or paper ; six years without seeing one friendly face, without hearing one friendly voice. And this for Bruno, the child of the South ; Bruno, with his passion, and his glad enjoyment of life ; Bruno, in the full maturity of his powers, and with his eager, restless, buoyant, ardent, nature. That six years of solitude must have been a martyrdom more fearful than the stake ; a martyrdom so terrible that the heroism which bore it unshaken is the grandest tone in the symphony of this sublime life.

Bruno was arrested in September, 1592, and, as soon as the news of his capture reached Rome, the Grand Inquisitor, San-Severina, sent to demand that the Republic should authorise the officials of the Holy Office in Venice to deliver up the person of the heretic to be dealt with at Rome. The following are the grounds of the accusation made against him : " This man is not only a heretic, but is a heresiarch. He has composed various works, in which he extols the Queen of England, and other heretical Princes. He has written many things on religion, and contrary to the faith, although he expresses them philosophically. He is an apostate, having been, at one time, a Dominican. He has lived a number of years at Geneva and in England. He has been pursued by justice, on the same grounds, at Naples, and at other places." The Venetian authorities refused to come to any resolution on the matter, pleading State pre-occupations ; and Bruno was left to drag on the weary years of his martyrdom, until in 1598 he was delivered up to the Roman officials. There were yet two years more of life before him, and these were chiefly spent in disputations with the learned doctors, who endeavoured to convert him ; for it would have been a greater triumph to the Inquisition to convert Bruno than to murder him ; and a struggle, protracted for two years, went on between the heretic and the champions of the Church. The subtlest disputants of Rome argued with him ; Bellarmine, the greatest controversialist of the time, was there ; and Bruno

was worn with his long solitude, and eager for life among men ; no thought of a crown eternal aided his constancy ; no hope of life beyond the grave buoyed him up ; yet he could not retract, for "he could only do so by being false to his convictions." At last the struggle drew to its end, and on February 9, 1600, he was led to the palace of San Severina, and forced on to his knees to hear his sentence read. He was solemnly excommunicated as Atheist, and degraded ; then came the long recital of his life's story, the analysis of his works, the record of the failure of all attempts to convert him to Christianity. Compelled to kneel, he listened to it all ; and then the civil officers were bidden take him, to be punished "without shedding of blood." No craven was Bruno then as he rose to his feet : "I think," he said, as he proudly raised his head ; "I think that you pronounce that sentence with more fear than I feel in hearing it." Eight days' grace was yet given him, in which to recant and deny the truth he believed ; but Bruno had not taught all through Europe, and borne eight long years of dungeon pain, to turn recreant now to his mistress Truth. The 17th of February dawns, and the day of his death is here. To the Champ de Flore they take him, through a howling, fanatic, crowd, composed, in great part, of pilgrims ; they have clad him in the sulphur-coloured garb of heresy, hideous with pictured devils and flames and crosses, but the dress cannot mar his grandeur of dignity, as he walks calmly on, his eyes bright, his forehead serene, his step firm and steady ; a priest pushes forward and presses on him a crucifix, but Bruno turns away his head, and will not touch it ; they bind him to the stake, and no word opens his lips ; the flames rise around him, but no cry escapes him ; to the end he is as serene as though he felt no agony, and the last glimpse the crowd catches of his face, ere the flame sears it, shows it calmly proud as ever ; and now the smoke and the fire surround him, and Giordano Bruno is gone for evermore. They scatter his ashes to the wind, and boast that nought is left of Bruno save the remembrance of his execution, and they forbid any to read his books, and fondly dream that they have slain his memory ; but now, in Rome, Bruno's memory lives, while that of his murderers only remains because their names are linked with his immortality, and on the base of the statue we are raising to him might fitly be engraven his own sublime words : "To know how to die in one century is to live for all centuries to come."

THE  
GOSPEL OF CHRISTIANITY,  
AND THE  
GOSPEL OF FREETHOUGHT.

BY  
ANNIE BESANT.



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# THE GOSPEL OF CHRISTIANITY

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## GOSPEL OF FREETHOUGHT.

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"I WILL not inquire," once said the Bishop of Peterborough, speaking to a large audience of Christians, "I will not inquire whether this gospel be true or false; I will only ask if it be good news." His Lordship was speaking of what he was pleased to call the Gospel of Science. I am a little at a loss to know to what the Bishop alluded in this sentence; Science can scarcely be said to pretend that her work is to proclaim a *gospel* to the world; it is hers to gaze up into the illimitable skies, and to describe to the dwellers on our earth the marvellous worlds which roll through the pure ether; it is hers to peer into the illimitable depths of existence, revealed through the microscope, and to report to us her discoveries of the fairy-lands which are hidden from our rough eye-sight in the drop of water, or in the down on an insect's wing; it is hers to scan earth's surface, and to sound the depths of ocean; to read in the records of the rocks the age of our world, or to translate the language of the hidden sea-bottom into words intelligible to us; it is her glory to search after the laws which "bind Nature fast in fate," to discover facts, to proclaim them to mankind; but I never heard it claimed for Science that she pretended to be the evangelist to men of a new gospel, or that she ever waited to ask, ere declaring some freshly-discovered fact, "is it good news?" Science worships Truth alone; her steady gaze is fixed upon the Real; she never glances aside to follow expediency. Her work is to declare what *is*; she leaves to others to say what ought to be. Pure, serene, unwavering, Science walks through this world of ours; a grand, clear, dry, light—illuminating all dark places; revealing, with equal lucidity, beautiful facts and ugly facts; as the rays of the sun fall alike on gorgeous palace and on

filthy hovel, on fair and happy faces, and on those ploughed deep with the lines of misery and want, so does the sunlight of Science throw clear beams on the glory of Nature, and illuminate with equal brightness its stains and its dark blots. "The gospel of Science," then, is a discovery which we owe to the supernatural vision of the Bishop of Peterborough. He takes some of the saddest revelations of Science; he points out how all Nature's order is based upon destruction; he shows how the iron chain of invariable sequence is never broken for human tears or human shrieks; he dwells on the fact that in Nature the weak must perish, while the strong survive to perpetuate their race: all these truths are dilated upon by the Bishop of Peterborough, and then he turns sharply round upon his appalled and shrinking hearers, and says: "I will not ask whether this be true or false; I will only ask if it be good news."

His Lordship of Peterborough has "dugged a pit, and has fallen himself into the destruction which he made for other." Science, I have said, only claims to discover and to reveal facts; good or bad, she tells them out with equal clearness. But mark you, she reveals only that which she finds. These harsh things said about Nature by Dr. Magee are *true* things; the whole fabric of Nature is built up upon a principle of death; the destruction of one creature is the salvation of another; the death of one is the life of another; the anguish of one is the pleasure of another; the torture of one is the amusement of the other. See the panther drop on the neck of the antelope; it is natural for him to do so. See the cat play with the injured mouse; it is natural to her to do so. See the vultures peck at the eyes of the dying buffalo; it is natural to them to do so. Science reveals these facts, with many another, all bearing the same signet. She points out how the earthquake spares not for the shrieks of the terrified people; how the waves smooth not at the cries of the drowning crew; how the fire leaps none the less high for the fierce moan of the burning man. But Science did not make the facts which she reveals. Science is not responsible for the revelation she unfolds. If the news told by Science is bad news, who is to blame for its badness? Answer, Bishop of Peterborough, you who believe in a Creator of the world. Suppose that I dig a mine, and fill it with gunpowder, and lay a train, and set alight the match which will kindle it. I then go away, and leave the match to burn, foreseeing that in due time my

gunpowder will explode, and bury a city in ruins. A man comes along, with clear, sharp eyes, noticing all around him; he sees the burning match, but cannot reach it to put it out; he hurries to warn the people of their danger; he shows them how to escape it. Is this man to blame for the danger of explosion, because he has discovered the danger, and not rather I, who am the cause of it? Is Science, then, to blame if the facts she reveals are sad, and not rather the cause of all those facts, he who, according to the Bishop of Peterborough, is the Author of Nature, he who foresaw all, designed all, over-rules all. If Nature is so evil, God, and not Science, is the one to be blamed.

But this is only according to the Bishop of Peterborough. *We* have no slur of this kind to cast on Nature. With many evils inherent in it, the scheme around us is slowly evolving the higher from the lower; mankind are growing gradually into a nobler type; increasing knowledge is enabling us to cope with Nature's rougher moods; nowhere is truer the axiom that "knowledge is power" than when we say that knowledge *of* Nature is power *over* Nature. While the Bishop of Peterborough is forced by his arraignment of Nature to deny either the power or the goodness of the God in whom he believes, we, who believe in no designer, award neither praise nor blame to any being for the order in which we find ourselves; the universe *is*, we are part of it; we can study it, improve it, beautify it, by means of powers inherent in itself; and therefore we meet the dangers in our path with courage, and mend its imperfections by our skill.

The facts around us not being dependent for their existence either upon our knowledge or upon our ignorance, I deny altogether that Science is to blame because much of her revelation to mankind is stern and sad. But there is a foe to Christianity in the battle-field of the world; there is a gospel, which is not Christian, which is being proclaimed to mankind; there is a banner, whose folds are just floating out upon the air of England, which is blazoned with a new heraldry for humanity. It is the gospel of Freethought, the banner of Secularism. This is the gospel which I assert as against the gospel of Christianity; this is the gospel whose superiority to the Christian gospel I am prepared to maintain. On behalf of this gospel I lift from the ground the challenge-gauntlet flung down by the Bishop of Peterborough, and I say that not only is it true, but it is also good news to

the world. This gospel is very much bound up with Science, and thus there may have been some confusion about it in the episcopal mind. A rumour may have penetrated to the depths of his palace, which murmured that a foe had arisen against Christianity, and was rapidly progressing, especially among those to whom Christianity had brought no glad tidings of great joy, to be found on earth. The gospel of Freethought is the daughter of Science; the good news she brings is based upon scientific facts; along the path in which she guides the feet of men she holds up the lamp of Science to show the way.

I intend now to lay before you the leading points of these two gospels, so that you may see clearly the advantages of each, and may judge between them; may see which of them has in it most hope for man, most promise for humanity.

The gospel of Christianity is good news because it reveals to us the existence of a God. It tells us of a God who is unlimited in being, but yet limited to a personal existence; unlimited in power, but yet frustrated and checkmated at every step; unlimited in goodness, yet allowing plagues and famines to desolate the world he loves, and the children he cherishes in his "Fatherly Heart;" the author of all things and perfectly holy, yet creator and ruler of a world where evil is found in all directions; a pure spirit, yet possessing face, hands, loins, feet, like a material human being.

The gospel of Freethought knows of no such being as this. Thought cannot think him out: reason cannot found his existence on any known facts; imagination cannot paint his picture, with its contradictory attributes; her colours all run into each other, and make a confused blot. A God of love? that is, a God so loving that he made a world, whose scheme is based on suffering and death; a God so loving that he formed the parents of the human race, and made the future of all mankind depend upon the eating of an apple; a God so loving that he then sent a serpent to tempt the woman whom he had predestined to fall; a God so loving that he drowned the world in his fury, because it was exactly what he had from all eternity designed that it should be; a God so loving that in Egypt he slew the little children, because the king, whose heart he had himself hardened, was hard-hearted; a God so loving that his chosen people slew men, and women, and the little ones even yet unborn, because these poor folks were living in a land coveted by the fierce



Hebrew race ; a God so loving that, as he himself says, he deceived his own messengers and put a lying spirit in the mouths of the prophet : a very loving God, truly, yet this is the God of love, whose disappearance would be so terrible a loss to the hearts of his children. A God of wisdom ? that is, a wise God who made his master-piece man so badly, that he fell to pieces at the first temptation ; a wise God whose whole work had to be destroyed because he had made it so badly that he himself got out of patience with it ; a wise God, whose every aim is thwarted both by man and Devil ; a wise God, whose wise plans are such a failure, that having drowned the world once, and tried his method over again, he has again failed so dismally that he is going to burn it all up, and make another new heaven and new earth, which, judging by past experience, are as likely to fail as their predecessors. Truly, this God has shown his wisdom very signally. A God of power ? that is, a strong God, whose projects are foiled, whose plans are defeated, whose will is not done ; a strong God who cannot even guard his poor creatures from a Devil, who appears, if we are to judge by results, to be more widely-present and more powerful than his own Maker. Truly a very strong God. The gospel of Secularism has no God. It sees a great universe, and knows only that it is ; it believes in no origin, because there is no reason for such a belief. Uncaused and self-existent Natural order rolls on ; the Secularist studies it, because, being himself a part of that order, his happiness lies in conformity with it ; he reverences it, as the mother who has given him birth ; he recognises the limitations imposed on him by the conditions of his being, and, instead of worshipping the Unknown, he studies it as far as he can, and devotes his whole strength to that for which his faculties fit him.

But the gospel of Christianity is good news because it speaks of a Father in Heaven, and, in painting his fair picture, it forgets the terrible blots with which this same God is disfigured. It appeals to the feeling of weakness and dependence in man, and it is here that its true power lies. A Father whose tender mercies are over all his works ? we will believe it when sinking ships, and destroying pestilences, and heart-rending accidents, can be proved never to have taken place. A Father who loves his children ? we will believe it when his children no longer starve and pine, when the noblest of the sons of men are no longer

outcasts and martyrs, when the bad are no longer princes, and the good no longer hated. A Father who hears the cry of his children? we will believe it when we find that prayer turns aside pain, and grief, and death, when the cry of the mother saves the life of her child, the pleading of the wife gives her dead husband back living to her arms. Hitherto, as has been well said, instead of finding that faith of the size of a grain of mustard-seed will move mountains, we have never yet found faith of the size of a mountain move a grain of mustard-seed. I do not deny that it is pleasant to believe in the existence of a Being who is always at hand to remedy your mistakes, and to save you from the painful consequences of your own actions. But, unfortunately for the Bishop of Peterborough's argument, the goodness or badness of news *does* very materially depend upon its truth or its falsehood. Suppose a man, through folly or through crime, has become bankrupt; it would be very good news for him to be told that on waking up the next morning he would find his fortune as large as ever. But what is the use of the good news if it be not true? This is exactly what the gospel of Christianity does: it goes to the murderer whose life is forfeited, and it says to him: "Jesus has suffered for you, and you will be rewarded with happiness in heaven if you believe in him." No matter how foul the life, Christianity offers to wipe away all past offences, and stop the consequences of all past actions. Mark you, Christians do not live up to their creed in daily life; they do not set the murderer, who is fit company for saints in heaven, free to mingle with them again on earth; they cannot restore the squandered fortune to the spendthrift, or the lost health to the profligate and the drunkard. Facts are too strong for their creed; only in an imaginary world can they promise an imaginary happiness. Friends, against these fair promises of Christianity, Freethought has nothing to offer you. Sternly just, she decrees: laws disregarded strike the transgressor. If you are intemperate in drink or food, then shaking hands, enfeebled brain, ruined constitution, shall teach you that punishment invariably follows on transgression. If you lead impure lives, abusing the good powers given you by Nature, then disease and premature old age shall tell you that natural laws cannot be trifled with without suffering. Secularism, like Nature, is here stern and immutably severe. But if these things are so, is it not well to proclaim them, so that men, knowing

the invariable law, may rule their lives well, and live happily? Show me one drunkard, who has first ruined his nerves, and has then steadied his shaking hand by prayer, and I will believe that this Christian doctrine of forgiveness by a loving Father is true and good news. Good news, I admit it to be to the thief, to the outlaw, to the murderer, in the sense that it would be good news to them to be told that all laws were repealed; but good news to the world it is not. Rather most evil news; for it encourages evil by promising escape from deserved punishment; it weakens good by giving to the good and to the bad one equal happiness. But the gospel of Freethought is really good news to the world, though bad news to the evilly-disposed while they refuse to amend their ways; for it warns men to avoid wrong-doing, by pointing out the misery which invariably follows evil; it strengthens men in leading noble lives, by showing them the good results that flow therefrom; it teaches the true path to happiness, by discovering and proclaiming natural laws. Christianity injures the world by condoning evil; Secularism blesses the world by making the happiness of one depend upon the good of all.

The gospel of Christianity is good news because it reveals to us the existence of the Devil. It does not tell us where he came from, or how he became a Devil. It tells us that God is all-holy, and it teaches us that God made good angels: it hints that Satan was a very fine specimen of an angel, a leader among angels, but that, at some indefinite time, he fell and became a Devil. Milton relates the whole affair in detail, but does not inform us how a perfect angel could do wrong of his own accord. In Job we meet Satan when he is half-way through his transformation, and is still quite at home in Heaven, and in fact plots with God to tempt Job. We meet him in the Gospels, where God, in the form of Jesus, still treats him with courteous respect, and argues with him. Later, he becomes a roaring lion and a dragon. What he is like now we are not told. But, as a Secularist, I venture to plead that this is *not* good news at all. The Christian may retort that it is true nevertheless. Then I challenge him for evidence. He can only give the assertion of his gospel: without Christianity we have no proof of the existence of the Devil, and I have, therefore, a right to say that the news is made by Christianity, and is most decidedly bad. Freethought has no Devil. It studies history, and therefore it knows, what most Christians do not know, where this notion

of a Devil comes from. We can trace the genealogy of the Christian Devil back a long way. We see him in Persia, co-ruler of the world with God : we meet him in every old faith ; light and darkness give birth to the ideas of God and Devil ; in Egypt Typhon, the principle of darkness, slays Osiris, the sun, the principle of light. The good and bad in Nature were referred, in the childhood of the world, to two hostile principles ; so far as I know, only the earlier Hebrew faith was without an evil Devil. The Hebrew Satan was originally a great and severe angel of God, who tried and tested men to see what they were worth, but this work was done in conjunction with God, as we see him in Job. The Hebrew Satan did not become God's enemy until the Jews had been captive in Babylonia, where their own majestic Satan became painted black, so to speak, and made into an evil spirit. Christianity took up this mingled Devil and darkened him yet more ; but it also preserved to him the co-equal power with God given to the Devil in Eastern lore. He became again the principle of evil, struggling always with, and often conquering, the principle of good. All over the world the Devil fights with God for man's soul, and generally wins it. Few there are who are to be saved in heaven, many there are who are to be lost in hell. In the end the Devil triumphs : in spite of God, in spite of the blood of Jesus, in spite of the Holy Spirit, the Devil is to reign for ever over the vast majority of mankind. We decline to think that this news about the Devil is good news. Good news to know that there is an evil spirit ever at our elbow, prompting us to sin ? Good news to know that there is a Devil always watching for a chance to seize us ? Good news to know that when we die, there will be a Devil waiting to try and catch us and drag us to hell ? No. This is bad news of the worst kind. And where is your God of power, O Christian, that he permits himself to be thwarted and set at nought by this Devil ? where is your God of love, that he allows his dear children to be enticed into sin by this Devil ? Some Christians dislike the Devil so much, that they try to refine him away, and make him into an allegory. But this cannot be allowed, unless they are willing to make God into an allegory too. The two beings must stand or fall together. If there is no need for a Devil to account for the evil in the universe, then there is no need for a God to account for the good in it. If you do not personify the destructive principle in nature, neither must you personify

the preservative ; there is no evidence for the existence of a God, that does not also prove the existence of a Devil. You must have both, or neither. The gospel of Christianity asserts the existence of both ; the gospel of Freethought denies the existence of both. And I affirm that the disproof of the Devil is good news to the world.

The gospel of Christianity is good news, because it brings "life and immortality to light." Now, before I am prepared to say that I can feel grateful for the gift of immortal life, I must know what kind of life it is that is to be bestowed upon me. On this point, at least, Christianity speaks clearly and definitely. Immortality is, this gospel tells us, divided into two kinds ; there is eternal life in heaven, and there is eternal death in hell. This heavenly life has not to me, I freely confess, many attractions. I am told that I shall meet there Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David ; but I do not care to associate with such people. Then there is the penitent thief, but I am not much attracted by him ; there are shoals of the people turned out of earth, because they were not thought fit for it, and I am not anxious to make their acquaintance. The best people of history are not there ; I must not hope to meet there the bearers of the great names I reverence and honour ; heretics of all ages will not be there ; philosophers and thinkers will not be there ; patriots and reformers will not be there. I may search in vain for the faces I love on earth ; not in heaven will be found the deniers of the Godhead, and those brave men who are now fighting for reforms. What then could I do in heaven ? Sadly I should walk through the golden streets, and lonely and desolate I should saunter on the banks of the river of life. Then the occupations of heaven are distasteful to me—singing evermore, and playing on a golden harp. Sweet music I should weary of. My brain and heart would cry out for work. Then the city would be comfortless ; it would be a cold, dazzling, hard, home. Streets of gold, gates of jewels ; barbaric splendour fit to sicken anyone, who loves the cool green of the summer forest, and the soft blue of the pure evening sky. This eternal life has no charms for me ; has it any attraction to anyone ? Friends, does it not draw its attracting power from the fact that *it is not hell*, from the fact that it is the only alternative of eternal death. In criticising this good news of immortality, I am bound to take into account the fact that there is an immortality of pain and anguish, which

this good news tells us is to be the lot of the majority of the human race. Listen to the gospel of Christianity: "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." So says Jesus himself. Hear the Roman Catholic Church; hear Spurgeon; hear the English Church in the person of one of her bishops. 'This is the good news to the world; this is the gospel of Christianity. Good news to the world that it shall be damned for ever in hell: that it shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the Lamb for ever and ever, and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night. Strange minds and hearts must Christians have if they really consider this horrible gospel to be good news. I marvel sometimes where this gospel of hell-fire had its birth; in what poor human heart, wrung with passionate hatred to mankind, embittered and soured by terrible wrongs, fired with fierce longing for revenge, did this awful phantom first take shape and form? Who first imaged out this ghastly notion of a heavenly Moloch, sitting on his throne, and wreaking on men an eternal hatred, mocking the helpless agony of his victims, and in bitter irony forcing them to call him their Father and a God of love. Never let Christianity dare to call itself good news, so long as hell is part of its gospel to mankind; never let it boast of the immortality it proclaims, so long as to the majority of mankind it only proffers an immortality of anguish unspeakable. If this gospel were true—nay, if there were even any probability of its being true—then every man and woman with a human heart would make a stern resolution never again to bring a child into the world who might be doomed to an eternity of suffering; never again would they co-operate with God, so as to form a body which God might thereafter be enabled to curse with the terrible gift of an immortal soul.

The gospel of Secularism has neither heaven nor hell to offer to the world. On the subject of immortality its lips are dumb. Science tells it nothing which points to continued life after death; all analogy is against it; we have never met life apart from organisation; we cannot conceive of mind as apart from matter. Life is, to us, an attribute of matter, under certain conditions, just as brightness is an attribute of the polished steel, sharpness of the

pointed iron. But Secularism bids us leave a future life alone. If there is one, we shall get it in due time ; if there is not, extinction is far preferable to torture, or to personal happiness while others are being tortured. Fix your eyes upon earth, Freethought says to the Secularist ; of this life you are sure : a heaven in the clouds has nothing to do with you *now* ; work rather to make a heaven upon earth : do not trouble how to meet a future life ; learn rather to live your present life well. It has been justly said : "For a long time men have been taught how to die ; what is wanted is, that they should be taught how to live." At any rate, Secularism removes from our sky the brooding, lowering, crowds which have darkened it so long ; it clears away from the tomb that terrible shadow which enshrouds it when the Christian lays there the body of some dear relative or beloved friend who has died without faith in God ; it quenches the lurid flames which might otherwise affright us when we lie upon our own death-beds, if we have spent our lives in serving man instead of in serving God ; it gives us that calm serenity which can quietly do its work here so long as strength holds out, and which, when death calls us, will enable us to lie down and die in peace.

The gospel of Christianity is good news because it comes to sinners with the offer of an Atonement for sin. Man, says Christianity, is lying under the heavy wrath of a justly-offended God, and then Jesus Christ, the Son of God, mercifully comes forward, and bears the punishment of sin for us by being crucified. I am not going to deal now with the subject of the Atonement doctrinally, nor to criticise the justice of its arrangements, or the ingenuity of its design. We are only concerned with it, as a prominent feature of the gospel of Christianity, as *good news* to the world. What benefit does the Atonement, supposed to be wrought by Jesus, confer on the world ? "It delivers us from sin and from the wrath of God." That it delivers us from sin, I deny ; that it delivers us from the wrath of God is a work of supererogation, if the gospel of Secularism is true. At any rate, it is not good news to be told that we are under the wrath of God ; news it is, for we should never have found it out for ourselves ; good, it most decidedly is not. The wrath of God is one of the blessings brought to light by the gospel of Christianity. An Atheist may go out into the country in a Sunday excursion-train, he may

enjoy the sweet scent of the flowers, and lie at ease on the green turf; he may listen to the rustle of the breeze through the leaves over his head, and hear the melody of the black-bird and the thrush as they warble out their happiness; all around him is, say Christians, the work of God, and all around him is ministering to his pleasure. A Christian comes along, and tells him that he is under the unchanging displeasure of God, and the Atheist feels the caress of the sunbeams, and he laughs at the idea that the Worker should be angry, when the works are so full of joy-giving power. We should never have guessed at the abiding wrath of God, if it had not been for Christianity. Christianity, however, having found the wrath, also finds the peace-offering, and then rejoices over its good news.

I would also have you observe, that all that the gospel of Christianity promises you deliverance from, it first creates; all the dangers it saves you from are pits of its own digging; all the curses it shields you from are arrows which it has first shot at you from its own bow. Search and see if any good thing promised you by Christianity be anything more than deliverance from some evil invented by this so-called gospel. It first puts chains on all your limbs, and then boasts loudly that it can show you how to take them off again. But the gospel of Secularism tells you that you *are* free men; that these chains are only shadowy links, made out of the fog of superstition; it bids you show your manhood by shaking them off you, and by standing fast in that liberty wherewith your nature makes you free. I cannot bid the Bishop of Peterborough farewell—the prelate who has so kindly given me the text of my lecture—without calling your attention to the bribe he offers to the people whom he is endeavouring to retain within the Christian fold. “I will not ask,” he says, “if it be true or false; I will only ask whether it be *good* news.” It is not often that a Christian speaks out so clearly about his motives in being religious. “I don’t care about truth or falsehood; I only want to believe that which is pleasant.” I have myself heard the question asked: “Why should I seek for truth, and why should I lead a good life, if there be no immortality, in which to reap a reward?” To this question the Freethinker has one clear and short answer: “There is no reason why you should seek Truth, if to you the search has no attracting power. There is no reason why you should lead a noble life, if you find your happiness in leading a



poor and a base one." Friends, no one can enjoy a happiness which is too high for his capabilities ; a book may be of intensest interest, but a dog will very much prefer being given a bone. To him whose highest interest is centred in his own miserable self, to him who only cares to gain his own ends, to him who seeks only his own individual comfort, to that man Freethought can have no attraction. Such a man may indeed be made religious by a bribe of heaven ; he may be led to seek for Truth, because he hopes to gain his reward hereafter by the search ; but Truth disdains the service of the self-seeker ; she cannot be grasped by a hand that itches for reward. If Truth is not loved for her own pure sake, if to lead a noble life, if to make men happier, if to spread brightness around us, if to leave the world better than we found it—if these aims have no attraction for us, if these thoughts do not inspire us, then we are not worthy to be Secularists, we have no right to the proud title of Freethinkers. If you want to be paid for your good lives by living for ever, in a lazy and useless fashion, in an idle heaven ; if you want to be bribed into nobility of life ; if, like silly children, you learn your lesson, not to gain knowledge, but to win sugar-plums, then you had better go back to your creeds and your churches : they are all you are fit for ; you are not worthy to be free. But we—who, having caught a glimpse of the beauty of Truth, deem the possession of her worth more than all the world beside ; who have made up our minds to do our work ungrudgingly, asking for no reward beyond the results which spring up from our labour—we will spread the gospel of Freethought among men, until the sad minor melodies of Christianity have sobbed out their last mournful notes on the dying evening-breeze, and on the fresh morning winds shall ring out the chorus of hope and joyfulness, from the glad lips of men whom the Truth has at last set free.

I could not forbear making these remarks upon a sentiment so poor, so mean, as that we were to choose our creeds for the sake of their pleasantness ; but—although I have not had time to touch upon the many other points in which the gospel of Secularism is better than the gospel of Christianity—I have yet, I hope, said enough to prove that, so far as the *goodness* of the news to the world goes, the advantage is with the message we proclaim. And naturally so. For the theory of Secularism is built up only in reference to the promotion of happiness in this world : if any

course does not promote human happiness, then that course is stamped by Secularism as *bad*; if any course promotes human happiness, then that course is stamped by Secularism as *good*. The gospel of Freethought is a proclamation to mankind of their true object in life, and of the means whereby to gain that object. But Christianity, on the other hand, asserts itself as a scheme which is intended to prepare men for a future life elsewhere; for the sake of that future they are to despise the present; for the sake of a crown in heaven they are to carry a cross on earth; if they would live unto God, they must die unto the world. Therefore Christianity has no right to pretend that it is a gospel to men while they are living on the earth; it cannot maintain that it promotes temporal happiness. It turns men's eyes from earth to fix them upon heaven; it bids them be careless of the temporal, while luring them to grasp at the eternal; it makes them less earnest in the present life, by bidding them brood over a life to come; it makes them endure life's wrongs and life's tyrannies with a cowardly patience, in the hope of a glory to be revealed. And therefore this gospel is *not* good for mankind. It is not good news to the poor and the oppressed, because it bribes them to be contented with their poverty, and to remain passive under their oppression; it is not good news for those who love men, because it dooms the greater part of our race to misery unending; it is not good news to the patriot and the reformer, for it tells him that his toil is wasted, being done for a world which is soon to be destroyed. Neither is the gospel of Freethought good news to everybody. But to the world the gospel of Freethought does really bring good news; glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all nations. It sweeps away all the terrors of the supernatural; it bids men look on earth as their fair heritage, capable of being beautified and cultured, through knowledge and skill and love. It brings tidings of peace, for it educates and refines, and teaches gentleness and brotherhood to all alike. And it brings tidings of freedom; tidings of freedom from political tyranny; tidings of freedom from priestly superstitions; tidings of freedom for heart and for brain; tidings that man shall no longer be a slave, either to a Church or to a King.

THE  
GOSPEL OF ATHEISM:

A Lecture.

BY  
ANNIE BESANT.

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# THE GOSPEL OF ATHEISM.

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PHILOLOGICALLY, my title is clearly indefensible ; gospel is but the contracted form of God's spell—spell being the Saxon equivalent of message, and gospel, therefore, means simply God's message. Atheism being without a God, cannot bring a message from one, and, in strictness, cannot be said to have a God's spell. The more common use of the word, however, is as a synonym for "good news," and the gospel of Christianity is usually translated as the good news of Christianity. Taking the word in this ordinary user, it is exquisitely adapted to the proclamation of Atheism ; for no philosophy, no religion, has ever brought so glad a message to the world as this good news of Atheism. I do not propose, in this paper, to defend Atheism from the metaphysical side, nor to attack the God-idea with the many weapons afforded by intellect and by morality ; my purpose is one far simpler ; it is to show to the unlearned the fallacy of popular prejudices against Atheism, and to put in plain, clear language the joy and the hope that are the inheritance of the Atheist.

There is a very common scarecrow set up by the orthodox on the field of inquiry, to frighten away timid birds from feeding on the grains of truth sown thickly on that fruitful soil. Round this artificial spectre rattle the skeletons of Heretics who have died in fear and anguish, as seen in the imagination of Christian writers. In its hand it holds a scroll of warning and of terror : "Atheism is cold and dreary ; there is no warmth in it, no hope for the world ; if you disbelieve in God, you will live in a frigid zone of doubt and despair ; you must crush out all emotion, and give up all that gilds and beautifies life." Many a timid and enthusiastic soul shrinks back appalled at the wintry prospect, and cowers in the stove-warmth of the churches, rather than go out into the bracing morning air, trusting that

beyond the walls there is radiant sunshine, and the fresh stir of healthful life. They guess not that the fog which arises from the marshes of artificial belief stretches but a little way, and may be traversed by a brave and steadfast will. They guess not that over the lens through which they gaze at the outside world priests have spread the crape of superstition, to darken the brightness without.

Last of all ought I to be the one to say that in the renoucal of belief in Christ the God-man, or in the Father in heaven, there is nothing of pain or grief to the earnest heart. Those to whom religion has seemed a reality cannot fail to suffer keenly in the wrench that tears out of the soil wherein it has struck deeply the root of faith. That keen anguish of finding that we have been building without a solid foundation; that "horror of great darkness" which falls upon us when we fear lest our God is only a dream of the fancy; that bitter resentment which springs up on finding that we have been lavishing our heart-treasures of love and devotion upon a phantom; all this involves agony, which is sharp in proportion to the nobility and the tenderness of the sufferer. This is the price we pay for the paradise-apples of superstition, which turn to ashes in the mouth. But beyond the struggle and the turmoil, on the other side of the river of doubt, there is firm ground on which to stand in peace at last, smooth sward on which to rest the wearied limbs, fair flowers to refresh the aching sight, wells of water springing up, in which to lave the throbbing brow. True, the prospect is not so wide as that seen from the mountain of faith; but then it is solid land, while the other was a mirage. True, the clouds are not so radiant with glory at the sunset; but the beauty that lies before us is substantial, while the other glory dies for ever with the sinking sun which gives it birth.

Why should the Sceptic be sad? What has the Atheist to fear in life or in death? Sadness is for the Christian, whose world lies under the curse of an angry God, whose sky is blackened by the thick clouds surrounding a coming Judge, whose life is darkened by the exactions of a merciless taskmaster, whose death is lurid-lit with the ghastly flames of the fire that never shall be quenched. Rightly have the noblest and purest Christian thinkers ever been the saddest; rightly have the most loving Christian hearts wept tears of blood; rightly is the ideal Christian type of humanity a man of sorrows. Jesus, with worn and

wasted body ; with sad, thin lips, curved into a mournful droop of penitence for human sin ; with weary eyes gazing up to heaven, because despairing of earth ; bowed down and aged with grief and pain, broken-hearted with long anguish, broken-spirited with unresisted ill-usage—such is the ideal man of the Christian creed. Beautiful with a certain pathetic beauty, telling of the long travail of earth, eloquent of the sufferings of humanity, but not the model type to which men should conform their lives, if they would make humanity glorious. And therefore, in radiant contrast with this, stands out in the sunshine, and under the blue summer sky, far from graveyards and torture of death agony, the fair ideal Humanity of the Atheist. In form strong and fair, perfect in physical development as the Apollo of Grecian art, radiant with love, glorious in self-reliant power, with lips bent firm to resist oppression, and melting into soft curves of passion and of pity ; with deep far-seeing eyes, gazing piercingly into the secrets of the unknown, and resting lovingly on the beauties around him ; with hands strong to work in the present ; with heart full of hope which the future shall realise, making earth glad with his labour and beautiful with his skill—this, this is the ideal man enshrined in the Atheist's heart. The ideal humanity of the Christian is the humanity of the slave, poor, meek, broken-spirited, humble, submissive to authority, however oppressive and unjust ; the ideal humanity of the Atheist is the humanity of the free man who knows no lord, who brooks no tyranny, who relies on his own strength, and makes his brother's quarrel his, proud, true-hearted, loyal, brave.

It is necessary to put briefly the Atheistic position, for no position is more continuously and more persistently misrepresented. Atheism is *without* God. It does not assert *no* God. "The Atheist does not say 'there is no God,' but he says, 'I know not what you mean by God ; I am without idea of God ; the word "God" is, to me, a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation. I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception, and the conception of which, by its affirmer, is so imperfect that he is unable to define it to me'" ("Free-thinkers' Text-Book," p. 118). The Atheist neither affirms nor denies the possibility of phenomena differing from those cognised by human experience. He affirms that, life being the resultant of conditions, varieties of life will arise from

varieties of conditions. For example—if the life-conditions in the planet Mars differ from those in the planet Earth, then the lives resulting therefrom will also differ. As his knowledge of the universe is extremely limited, and very imperfect, the Atheist declines either to deny or to affirm anything with regard to modes of existence of which he knows nothing. Further, he refuses to believe anything concerning that of which he knows nothing, and affirms that that which can never be the subject of knowledge, ought never to be the object of belief. While the Atheist, then, neither affirms nor denies the unknown, he *does* deny all which conflicts with the knowledge to which he has already attained. For example—he *knows* that one is one, and that three times one are three; he *denies* that three times one are, or can be, one. The position of the Atheist is a clear and a reasonable one: “I know nothing about ‘God,’ and, therefore, I do not believe in him, or in it; what you tell me about your God is self-contradictory, and is, therefore, incredible. I do not deny ‘God,’ which is an unknown tongue to me: I do deny your God, who is an impossibility. I am without God.” There are, however, some Freethinkers who prefer the name “non-Theist” to that of “Atheist.” On them we need not delay. The two words are exactly the same in meaning, only the prefix to the one is Latin, to the other Greek. “Not a Theist” is the meaning of both, and it is only the general ignorance which gives to the one a tolerance it refuses to the other. Yet, strange that any Freethinker should be ashamed to be called an Atheist. “Atheist” is one of the grandest titles a man can wear; it is the Order of Merit of the world’s heroes. Most great discoverers, most deep-thinking philosophers, most earnest Reformers, most toiling pioneers of progress, have, in their turn, had flung at them the name of Atheist. It was howled over the grave of Copernicus; it was clamoured round the death-pile of Bruno; it was yelled at Vanini, at Spinoza, at Priestley, at Voltaire, at Paine; it has become the laurel-bay of the hero, the halo of the martyr; in the world’s history it has meant the pioneer of progress, and where the cry of Atheist is raised there may we be sure that another step is taken towards the redemption of humanity. The Saviours of the world are too often first howled at as Atheists, and then worshipped as Deities. The Atheists are the vanguard of the army of Freethought, on whom falls the brunt of the battle, and are



shivered the hardest of the blows ; their feet trample down the thorns that others may tread unwounded ; their bodies fill up the ditch that, by the bridge thus made, others may pass to victory. Honour to the pioneers of progress ; honour to the vanguard of Liberty's army ; honour to those who, to improve earth, have forgotten heaven, and who, in their zeal for man, have forgotten God.

It is urged against Atheism that it is "negative," and that out of a negation no fruit can spring. But it is an error to regard any truth as negative and barren, for all truth is positive and fruitful. The contradiction of error, where error is supreme, is necessary to make possible the affirmation of truth ; the destruction of falsehood is not negative work, but is the necessary preliminary to the assertion of the truth which the falsehood has negated ; just as, in a darkened room, the shutters must be taken down before the sunlight can stream in and men can see to read therein, so in the darkened intelligence must be taken down the shutters of superstition fastened by the priesthood over the windows of the human mind, before the sunlight of knowledge can stream in and the lessons of experience can be learned. It is perfectly true that the belief that we are without God is not, *in itself*, sufficient for the guidance of human life, any more than is the belief that there is a God ; but just as Theism implies not only belief in God, but also the duty of obedience to his supposed laws, so does Atheism imply not only non-belief in God, but also the duty of accordance with the results of experience codified as moral and physical laws. Bare Theism and bare Atheism are alike unfruitful, but as the soil nourishes or starves the root planted in it, so do they either nourish or starve the root of human life which strikes in them. We contend that the soil of Atheism bears the fairest flowers and the strongest trees, and that over it sweep the purest winds and shines the warmest sun. The denial of an error is the affirmation of the antagonistic truth ; the denial of the supernatural is the affirmation of the sufficiency of the natural, the denial of the usurped supremacy of God is the affirmation of the rightful sovereignty of man.

Atheism claims the right to think, and the right to speak the thought, without any penalty being imposed upon the thinker. It denies that there is any subject so sacred that it should not be investigated ; any assertion so authoritative that it may not be tested. While Christianity proclaims

that hell is the foreordained punishment for unbelief in doctrines incapable of verification by experience, Atheism asserts that unbelief is a duty where evidence is insufficient, and that faith in dogmas relating to the unknown is foolish credulity. While Christianity deifies the unknown, Atheism studies it, and offers to truth but one homage, the homage of investigation. While Christianity fears God, labours for heaven, strives to avoid hell, obeys revelation, Atheism goes on its way, fearless of aught save untruth; it knows no God, it works for earth alone, it recognises utility as its only guide, human happiness as its only aim. It bids all men think, without dread of damnation; it bids all men speak, without dread of human punishment; it proclaims that all men owe to society the duty of thought, and the duty of uttering thought, and that those men serve best their country and their age whose thought is most diverse from the general thought, and most untinctured by the orthodoxy of the day.

"But Atheism," it is urged, "does not explain the origin of existence." Perfectly true; Theism does not; nothing does. Origin of existence is unthinkable, even as annihilation of existence. The Theist believes in a self-existent God, of whom he knows nothing; the Atheist believes in a self-existent universe, of which he knows a little. To regard the universe as created, and God as self-existent, is not to explain the *origin* of existence; it is only to cover the difficulty up in a wrapper, and to write on the wrapper "God." In the old fable, to the question, "On what does the world rest?" the answer comes, "An elephant." "And on what does the elephant rest?" "A tortoise." "And on what does the tortoise rest?" "It is self-supporting." Would it not be simpler to make the world self-supporting at once? Theism names the tortoise God, and plumes itself on its superior knowledge. In reality, Theism gives us a double-difficulty; it leaves us the mystery of existence, and it imposes on us in addition the mystery of creation. Existence evolving endless forms, differing modes, changing phenomena, is wonderful enough; but a God, self-existing, who creates out of nothing, who gives birth to an existence entirely diverse to his own, "matter" from "spirit," "non-intelligence" from "intelligence," who being everywhere makes the universe, thereby excluding himself from part of space, who being everything makes the things that are not he, so that we have everywhere and somewhere else, every-

thing and something more—such a God solves no question of existence, but only adds an unnecessary riddle to a problem already sufficiently perplexing.

“God” is always the equivalent of “I do not know.” Historically, God has lessened as knowledge has increased. “God” is the answer of the savage to every phenomenon of nature, to everything new, to everything not understood; “God” was the answer of the Greek to the sea-waves rolling in storm-billows, to the pestilence, to the roar of the thunder; “God” was the answer of ignorance, terrified at a nature unamenable to human control. Step by step knowledge has rescued the universe from God; now men speak of law where once they spoke of the Divine will; now men speak of evolution where once they spoke of creation. Even yet that which is unknown is still labelled Divine, and said to be “unknowable:” the composition of the sun is to the savage an “inscrutable mystery,” and the “inscrutable Power” of to-day will be scrutinised by those who come after us. The unknown stretches before us; who shall dare call it the unknowable? Men speak of the “insufficiency of Nature to produce what we see around us,” and so they fashion a God outside her. Have they, then, explored every corner of this mighty universe, that they thus weigh Nature in the balance, and find her wanting? Have they learned all the secrets of her alchemy, and examined every agent in her vast laboratory? Have they felt every pulse of her being, and penetrated the womb of the mighty mother of life? Until they possess all knowledge let them cease to prate about the “insufficiency of Nature,” for they are only making their own ignorance the measure of Nature’s power, and fancying that because *they* do not know, therefore *she* cannot do.

Instead of inventing an unknowable to account for the known, and then bowing the knee before it, Atheism places men face to face with Nature, and says: “Study, experiment, discover.” All science is, by necessity, Atheistic, for science does not recognise God as a hypothesis to account for an unknown effect; it is never content until it has discovered a real cause. Science is not possible in a world governed by a miracle-working God; the “stoppage of the sun” by Joshua, and the “sending back of the sun” for Hezekiah, would render impossible all solar observation. Imagine the feelings of a Herschel in the days of Hezekiah, when some slowly-elaborated results of careful

solar observations were suddenly destroyed by the erratic conduct of the luminary, and he was informed, while perplexedly reconsidering his problem: "Oh, its only a sign that king Hezekiah will get over his boil!" How would his brother scientists look at the Astronomer Royal if, on the discovery of a new star, he announced his intention of starting off to Dahomey, to worship the child king just born there? When the great comet appeared in 1456, the sword of God's wrath hovering over the world, Theists fell on their knees to God, and Pope Calixtus III. prayed it out of sight. Science caught it, looked at it, turned her back on God and his wrath, marked out its orbit, and announced the year of its return.

Every branch of science *must* be Atheistic if it is to progress. Take the science of medicine: prayer is used for a sick person. Either it has some effect or no effect: if it has some effect, how is the physician to regulate his prescription, for his medicine, estimated to produce a certain given effect, has mixed with it an unknown quantity of a potent drug named Prayer? If the doctor's drugs are too strong, will prayer dilute them? if too weak, will prayer strengthen them? or, is it not true, that the physician calculates solely by his drugs, and leaves prayer out of the question? is it not further true that he would be taken up for manslaughter if to third-rate drugs he added first-rate prayer? Or take navigation, and shipbuilding; does prayer add to the safety of the ship or not? if it does, will rotten wood and rusty nails do, provided the cracks are pitched with plenty of prayer? When the Archbishop of Canterbury prays over a vessel, christened by the hands of a princess, does he improve the chances of that vessel in a storm? If he does not, why does he pray? if he does, would he sail for America in a "coffin-ship" full of praying missionaries, as readily as in a well-built Cunarder? How could the science of meteorology be utilised unless it were Atheistic? If God makes the clouds his chariot, and walketh on the wings of the wind, is not meteorology blasphemous? Imagine God starting on the wings of the wind from America, and the message on the cable outstripping God and his storm, and warning the vessels into harbour which he would otherwise have sent to the bottom! Storm-signals are terribly Atheistic. And lightning-rods? When they were first heard of a French Roman Catholic priest remarked that they were either very Atheistic or else

very blasphemous ; now, so far from regarding the lightning as the bolt of God's wrath, we put up rods to guard our homes and our workshops, and even, as it has been remarked, we put them on churches, lest God, in throwing about his bolts, should, by mistake, burn down his own house. Thus, only by disregarding all idea of God, *i.e.*, by becoming Atheistic, science has become possible ; and if Atheism never did more for the world than to clear the way for science, Atheism would have done good service, for science is the true Revealer, the true guide of human life.

In dealing with evil, Atheism is full of hope instead of despair. To the Christian evil is as everlasting as good ; it exists by the permission of God, and, therefore, by the will of God. Our nature is corrupt, inclined to evil ; the devil is ever near us, working all sin and all misery. What hope has the Christian, face to face with a world's wickedness ? what answer to the question, Whence comes sin ? To the Atheist the terrible problem has in it no figure of despair. Evil comes from ignorance, we say ; ignorance of physical and of moral facts. Primarily from ignorance of physical order ; parents who dwell in filthy, unventilated, unweather-tight, houses, who live on insufficient, innutritious, unwholesome food, will necessarily be unhealthy, will lack vitality, will probably have disease lurking in their veins : such parents will bring into the world ill-nurtured children, in whom the brain will generally be the least developed part of the body ; such children, by their very formation, will incline to the animal rather than to the human, and by leading an animal, or natural, life, will be deficient in those qualities which are necessary in social life. Their surroundings as they grow up, the home, the food, the associates, all are bad ; they are trained into vice, educated into criminality ; so surely as from the sown corn rises the wheatear, so from the sowing of misery, filth, and starvation, shall arise crime. And the root of all is poverty and ignorance. Educate the children, and give them fair wage for fair work in their maturity, and crime will gradually diminish and ultimately disappear. Man is God-made, says Theism ; man is circumstance-made, says Atheism. Man is the resultant of what his parents were, of what his surroundings have been and are, and of what they have made him ; himself the result of the past, he modifies the actual, and so the action and re-action go on, he himself the effect of what is past, and one of the causes of what is to

come. Make the circumstances good, and the result will be good, for healthy bodies and healthy brains may be built up, and from a state composed of such, the disease of crime will have disappeared. Thus is our work full of hope; no terrible will of God have we to struggle against; no despairful future to look forward to, of a world growing more and more evil, until it is, at last, to be burned up; but a glad fair future of an ever-rising race, where more equal laws, more general education, more just division, shall eradicate pauperism, destroy ignorance, nourish independence, a future to be made the grander by our struggles, a future to be made the nearer by our toil.

"But Atheism has no hope of immortality." Is this a loss? It would be so if immortality meant a life *for all* of happiness, or of continually improving conditions of happiness; but the immortality the Christian boasts is nothing of the kind; Christian immortality is an eternity of unimaginable torture for the many, and of low-class felicity for the few; Christian immortality makes death a terror, lest the dear one we have lost may be writhing in hell, instead of sleeping in the grave; Christian immortality darkens life by the fear of the impenetrable darkness, "the prison whence none goeth forth." But is it true that Atheism has no immortality? What is true immortality? Is Beethoven's true immortality in his continued personal consciousness or in his glorious music, deathless while the world endures? Is Shelley's true life in his existence in some far-off heaven, or in the pulsing Liberty his lyrics send through men's hearts, when they respond to the strains of his lyre? Music does not die though one instrument be broken; thought does not die, though one brain be shivered; love does not die, though one heart's strings be rent; and no great thinker dies so long as his thought re-echoes down the ages, its melody the fuller-toned the more human brains send its music on. Nor only to the hero and the sage is this immortality given; it belongs to each according to the measure of his deeds; world-wide life for world-wide service; straitened life for straitened work; each reaps as he sows, and the harvest is gathered by each in his rightful order. The Atheist's immortality is the immortality of the stars; fair and bright and beloved are all the jewels of the sky, but some outshine the rest; and as the wave-tossed mariner, astray and storm-driven, looks up to the heavens, and guides himself thereby to his home, so do peoples striving for

freedom, so do nations beaten back and distressed, gaze upwards into Liberty's heaven where shine the hero-souls, "lighting the way to her shrine," and guided and inspired by the Immortals they struggle home to her breast.

"But Atheism is dangerous. Remember the French Revolution." First of all, Atheism is not to blame for the Revolution, if by the Revolution be meant the Reign of Terror. The Atheistic party in the Revolution was the Gironde, and the Gironde perished, sacrificed by the Theism of Robespierre; the Atheists were the first victims of the evil part of the Revolution. Atheism is, however, responsible for the reforming side of the Revolution; Diderot, D'Holbach, and many another, were Atheists, and to them humanity owes the spirit which destroyed feudalism, which made the French nation, which dethroned the Bourbons, which proclaimed the Republic. Alas! that the long-enslaved people had not vitality enough to finish the work; alas! that superstition, overthrown for the moment, built up an imperial throne on a re-triumphant Church and on a shattered Liberty. "Atheism is dangerous." Dangerous to whom? Not to the criminal classes; for them it labours and strives, and it elevates them into some hope of the future. Not to the poor; for it demands for them justice, pleading for equality of opportunity for each member of the State. Not to the oppressed; for it proclaims to them the right and the duty of resisting oppression, and of breaking into pieces the tyrant's chain. To whom then is Atheism dangerous? It is dangerous to the unfairly wealthy, to those who regard human beings as machines to win gold for their masters; to them it is dangerous, for Atheism means justice. It is dangerous to superstition, to ignorance, and to the classes that prey upon the credulity of their neighbours; to them it is dangerous, for Atheism means knowledge. It is dangerous to the oppressor, to the tyrant who builds his throne out of the bodies of the slain citizens, and who twines his crown out of the thorns of their distress; to him it is dangerous, for Atheism means Liberty. It recognises no king in heaven and no king on earth; it knows nought of a priesthood, and nought of a right divine. Marvel not, then, that against Atheism should arise all monopoly of privilege, all possession of ill-gotten gains, all tyranny in Church and State. Marvel not that against Atheism kings fulminate laws, and priests thunder damnation; for Atheism shakes every throne, and undermines every church; Atheism strikes at every mitre, and Atheism shivers every crown.

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## CHRISTIAN PROGRESS.

IF Christianity be a divine revelation, supernaturally bestowed upon man, it is clear that the "faith once delivered to the saints" must be unchanging, unimprovable, perfect. A revelation from God cannot be improved on by man, and the "deposit" must be handed on from generation to generation, neither increasing nor diminishing in amount. The doctrines taught by Christ and his apostles must be taught by their successors until "the end" come, and English Christians of to-day be one in faith with the whole great Church Catholic from the first to the nineteenth century. I do not intend to say that every form, every custom, every rite, of every Christian church in every century must be identical; the accidents may vary, but the substance must remain the same. On grave points of doctrine, opposing views cannot both be accurate: on weighty matters of faith contradictory opinions cannot both be right. The nature of the Deity worshipped, of the worship acceptable to him, the destiny of the human race—these, at least, must be one in their main outline; the fall of man, God's plan of redemption—these, at least, must be "of faith."

But if there be one fact concerning Christianity more clear in history than another, it is that there has not been one solitary doctrine which has been the unchanging inheritance of the Christian world. Whether God were a Trinity in Unity, or a Unity without distinction of persons, even this fundamental doctrine was doubtful during the first few centuries after Christ. For many a long year the Unitarian and the Trinitarian theories struggled for the mastery, until the latter triumphed and became the "Catholic" doctrine. The Christianities of the first centuries, of the dark ages, of the Reformation period, of the eighteenth century, and of our own time, are not the same; the main characteristics of

the creed vary with each new development of civilisation, and the heresy slain in one century rises as the faith of the next. This gradual process of purification and development, necessary before the Christianity of the monks of the Thebaid could become the Christianity of Farrar and of Stanley, is one which would be wholly reasonable and admirable were Christianity a theory of life slowly elaborated by man during his upward march; but the fact is fatal to Christianity as an order of life revealed by a supreme being; to admit it is to say that the statue given to men as a model, sculptured by God, is capable of being improved and beautified by the chisel of man.

A curious book which has fallen into my hands affords an admirable microcosm of Christianity. The spirit of a creed is revealed more plainly, perhaps, in its songs than in anything else; and the hymns of the Christian churches may be studied as—to use some words in my book's preface—"a kind of ecclesiastical history." The book in question is entitled: "A Collection of Hymns of the Children of God in all Ages, from the Beginning till Now;" it was printed in London in the year 1754, and the hymns are arranged in chronological order. We have (1) Anthems from the Bible; (2) Scripture put into metre; (3) Hymns of the Primitive Church; (4) Hymns of the Ancient Waldenses, and the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren; (5) Hymns of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. I propose to glance at these, and see if they can be said to represent, in any fashion, the Christianity of to-day; or whether, on the contrary, Christianity has not, since then, advanced many a mile on the road towards civilization.

Of the "Anthems from the Bible" little need be said: one is a long extract from the "Song of Sölomon," beginning:

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,"

and proceeding in a strain to which Mr. Collette's attention should be drawn, as being calculated to excite and deprave the young.

Some of the Scripture hymns are quaint. They are founded on incidents recorded in the Bible; thus, the hymn relating the visit of the shepherds to the infant Jesus, concludes:

"Dearest Jesus! do thou kiss us,

Then we too will gladly tell

To each stranger, see who lies there,

It is ev'n Immanuel."

Matt. xxiii. 37, is thus versified :

“Display thy both wings over  
Thy chickens and them cover,  
O Jesu, Saviour mild !  
If devils would disturb 'em,  
Let holy angels curb 'em,  
And bid them never touch thy child.”

Mark xvi. 18, is translated with a faith that is indeed great :

“Should any pois'nous snake  
Disturb you in your preaching,  
Bid it the place forsake,  
And go ye on with teaching ;  
Should one that bears you grudge,  
Worse fumes than arsenic.  
Within your body lodge,  
It shan't ev'n make you sick.”

There is a realism about this verse that shows the robust nature of the ancient Christian belief in the literal truth of the Bible. How degenerate are the Christians of our own day !

The hymns of the primitive church are somewhat useful, as popularising the views of the “Christian Fathers,” for they are mostly versifications of the old writings of the church, now so little read. It is strange—in the light of after events—to hear Clement of Alexandria speak of Christians as a “a race pacific,” while the Æthiopic church sings of

“ . . . the church by Thee combined  
The apostolic, *that can't be disjoined.*”

If only the Christians of that day could have glanced into the future, and seen all the sects that can't be united !

In these hymns we also find the revolting coarseness of expression from which modern Christianity has only partially freed herself. Thus we have :

“Thy Blood sweat, dear Saviour,  
Rain on me like water ;  
For all the world over  
Nought can bless one better :  
O Sweat's dear flood ! O holy Blood !”

From this time onwards we have, in metrical form, the most offensive doctrines of Christianity : Redemption by blood, God's wrath to man, man's wicked nature, the substitutionary atonement wrought by Christ—all these doctrines, which modern Christianity is covering decently with

fig-leaves, show themselves in their original nakedness and are not ashamed.

“Man is by nature spoiled throughout, full of corruption,  
And we have all caught the infection,  
Which is that dreadful infatuation,  
An inborn and an universal depravation.”

How people, who believed this, could reconcile it to their consciences to bring such horrible baby-monsters of iniquity into the world, is one of the mysteries of the faith ; for babies are included in so many words :

“I do believe, since Adam’s fall,  
That mankind are by nature all,  
Both father, mother, and each child,  
Nothing but sin, throughout defiled.

They from the very womb are fraught  
With inclinations bad and naught ;  
Belief in God, on t’other side,  
And God’s true fear have in them dy’d.”

The poor babies, however, have a chance :

“Of Baptism our belief is this :  
It truly necessary is,  
Since God thereby to sinner’s race  
Has thought fit to hold forth his grace.

And hence ev’n little children we  
Baptise in Jesu’s death most free ;  
Them to the Lord we thus present,  
Who then a child sees with content.”

Eternal punishment was, of course, an article of faith :

“But those who’re wicked and profane,  
(And devils, too) go into pain,  
Eternal punishment in hell,  
As scabbed sheep, to bear and feel.

We blame, then, those who teach and vent,  
That whoso into hell is sent,  
Or man or devil, must not so  
Eternal Torment undergo.”

The Canon Farrar of that day would have found his pulpit in a prison, not in Westminster Abbey.

A number of the articles of the English Church are next presented to us, clad in verse, and in these we have some of the most objectionable of Christian doctrines. It is difficult to understand why modern and enlightened Christians permit the “forty stripes save one” still to be laid on the backs



of their clergy. Among these sixteenth-century hymns are some quaint conceits, such as representing the wound made by the spear in Christ's side as a "post-bag," wherein letters may be dropped addressed to the Father ; or again :

" ' I am the door,' said Christ ; the spear's sad art  
Now hath unlocked him at the very heart."

Or—

" The Saviour pressed to death, there ran  
Out of his sacred wounds  
That wine, which glads the heart of man,  
And all his foes confounds."

So near to the time of Luther, we cannot be surprised to find the substitution of Christ for the sinner, and the worthlessness of good works much insisted on :

" What greater glory could there be  
Than to be cloath'd with God ?  
He drew his skin upon my skin,  
His blood upon my blood."

One sings that if he had fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and reared the orphan, it would have been of no avail, for

" Nothing was precious in God's sight,  
But God's own precious blood ;  
Had he not dy'd, my sentence yet  
In perfect force had stood."

One more gem must be selected before we leave the sixteenth century : it describes Christ's agony in the garden :

" Like melting wax, rivers of blood  
His very heart sweats from within,  
Thro' the pure strainer of his skin ;  
Bubbling all o'er his body stood."

In the seventeenth century we find, here and there, a hymn of higher tone, such as the well-known :

" When all Thy mercies, O my God."

But the mass still remains coarse, and "breathing out slaughter" in tone. Christ's "wounds" are still the main inspiration :

" As small birds use a hole to chuse  
In hollow tree for cover,  
When whirlwinds blow, when hail and snow  
O'er man and beast doth hover ;

So I to thee, Lord Christ, do flee,  
 Within thy wounds retired ;  
 When sin and death did stop my breath,  
 Here I again respired."

Or—

"Thy blood shall of my wedding dress  
 Be then the only splendour."

Here is a picture of God, as seen by Christ in 'Gethsemane :

"He saw that face, whose very sight  
 Cheers angels with its beatific light,  
 Contracted now into a dreadful frown,  
 All cloath'd with thunder, big with death,  
 And showers of hot burning wrath,  
 Which shortly must be poured down."

And this is "our Father in heaven," whom we are to love, and in whose goodness we are to believe !

Quite different is the following love song, which sung to a good jig—à la Sankey—would be really refreshing after the wounds-and-death series.

"What though the world foameth and rageth with fury !  
 I'll give to my beautiful Jesus the glory !  
 I roundly declare it ; I'll know nothing ever,  
 But only to kiss my dear crucified Saviour.

My Jesus takes notice of hearts for him pining,  
 He sweetens their grief while round him they are twining :  
 All this I've experienc'd, therefore I will hold him,  
 I'll cling round my Jesus, my arms shall enfold him.

Look yonder, my Jesus comes freely to meet me ;  
 He burneth for love, he will amorously greet me :  
 O love ! what in all the world can better please us ?

• Who'd not with full purpose of heart cleave to Jesus ?"

The love of the singer of this can certainly not be accused of coldness.

The eighteenth-century hymns form nearly one half of our book, and are a collection of all the special favourites of that time ; many do not err on the side of brevity, and we find twenty-four, thirty-six, and even more verses in a single hymn. Let us hope that, like some of the Scotch Presbyterians, the pious singers sat during their minstrelsy. The poetry still remains very imperfect, and curious, indeed, must have been the ears who were satisfied with such rhythm (?) as :

"Hence 'tis, that the Lord's own bosom friend,  
 Who God-word and Lambkin still combined,

All mankind in Atheism so hath comprized,  
 Who'll not the Son to own be advised  
 As God and Man."

It may be that those truly Christian souls regarded musical verses as savouring too strongly of the world to be meet for the lips of the godly. Art, poetry, music, all these are of the earth, earthy; and Christians of the sterner sort—who ever remember that it is written of those who love the world that the love of the Father is not in them—are always enemies of the beautiful, and turn away their eyes from beholding the attractive charms of delicate and polished grace.

We find our eighteenth-century friends gloating over the "blood" as ravenously as those of an earlier date. One gentle creature sings:

"I'll live and dwell by this blest flood,  
 The flowing stream of Jesu's blood."

Living by this river, however, is not enough: the Christian needs more:

"Jesus, the hungry sinner's Feast,  
 Jesus, the sinner's only good;  
 This will we only thirst to taste,  
 The Quintessence of Jesu's blood."

Living beside blood; drinking blood. What next? The Christian answers:

"Let my heart keep swimming  
 In thy purple gore,  
 And be hourly feeding  
 On each wound and sore."

The blood next turns into glue:

"When in his blood I saw him swim,  
 A small drop I did get;  
 This glued him to me, me to him,  
 The first time that we met."

Nor are its uses yet exhausted:

"The Saviour's blood and righteousness  
 My fin'ry is, my wedding dress."

The blood is also used for washing in:

"And no drop so small  
 Then did from Him fall  
 Which can't wash us all."

If money is wanted, the blood

"Fills all the treasures divine,  
 And is in heaven still current coin."

The bride, being now washed in, dressed in, and drinking blood, comes to the bridegroom, and embraces him "with pleasure" :

"He is so precious in her eye  
His blood such joys doth lend her,  
She thinks no thing in earth or sky  
Can sparkle with such splendor ;  
Quite melted she gazes, and looks in each wound,  
And bows fore his bleeding sceptre ;  
She's glad to embrace him, in blood-grace abound,  
Since there she only finds pasture."

The climax is reached in a litany :—

"Thy sweat in thy agony  
Bedew our souls and bodies !  
The bloody gore from thy body  
Wash our feet !  
Besweated hair  
Wipe them !  
The pale lips  
Kiss us upon the heart !  
O bespittled cheeks !  
That the Father may not spit on us !  
Mouth, venting moisture,  
Let none be spued out by thee !"

After all this, it is scarcely necessary for a Christian to tell us :

"Thy wounds and blood,  
My Lord and God,  
With these shall be my conversation.  
On these shall be my meditation,  
Till I come to see  
Thee."

Pah ! the idea is absolutely sickening ; and yet I might print page after page of such extracts. There is scarcely a hymn among the 460 in this second half of the book which is not full of blood. But it is, plainly, only our blindness and hardness of heart which prevents us from enjoying the idea, for :

"How can a sinner hear these words :  
Grace, Jesus, Blood, and Wounds,  
And not discern that harmony,  
Which from each word resounds ?"

The harmony is not audible to me, so clearly I have no ear for this kind of music.

What sort of creatures are they who so rejoice in these ghastly charnel-house horrors? Naturally they are worms :

“What are we? little hearts;  
In Jesu’s blood so pure,  
Worms swimming on secure,  
Enamour’d with his four nail-prints fair.”

Again :

“Hear what thy worms are telling,  
See how their veins are swelling.”

Again :

“I, little worm so poor,  
Quite spoil’d through sin and stained,  
Yet by my Lamb’s red gore  
And bloody sweat regained.”

The pitiable state of degradation which this self-abasement produces is seen in the whole mental tone of these hymns. There is in them no manliness, no joyous self-reliance, no hearty courage, only a cringing craven beseeching for mercy :

“O tender mercy, glorious grace,  
To save a curs’d and damned race !  
The Father gave his only Son,  
To bleed and die for slaves undone.”

Again :

“We all with deepest shame here blush  
To grace we have no right nor plea,  
But this, that thou bestow’st it free ;  
We’re humbled, prostrate in the dust.”

The lowest depth of nastiness is reached in a long hymn, from which we offer the two following stanzas as the *ne plus ultra* of repulsiveness :

“Our husband’s side-wound is, indeed,  
The Queen of all his wounds ;  
On this the little Pidgeons feed,  
Whom cross’s air surrounds.  
There they fly in and out and sing,  
Side’s blood is seen on every wing,  
The bill that picks the side-hole’s floor,  
Is red of blood all o’er.

Blest flock in the cross’s atmosphere,  
You smell of Jesu’s grave ;  
The vapours of his corpse so dear  
Are the perfume you have.  
It’s scent is penetrant and sweet !  
When you each other kiss and greet,  
This scent discovers that you were

Is there one Christian congregation which would now sing this disgusting hymn? The very lowest and most ignorant of ranters would loathe it. The general ghastliness of thought is relieved, here and there, by verses which are purely funny, such as :

“ Then evermore be  
An husband to me,  
My king who me bought !  
Thy litle point make me, thy atom, thy nought.”

Or :

“ In his chair he seats himself who rules us,  
And as soon as kissing’s over, schools us.

Or :

“ Gentle wounds of Jesus,  
So mild and pretty,  
There’s nothing like you sure in any city,  
To suit us babes.”

Or :

“ Now here the thought comes in my heart,  
Might I a babe abide !  
And throughout in the baby-cart,  
My course determin’d ride.”

Or :

“ Our God the Lamb  
Is still the same ;  
Whate’er he says,  
Most surely comes to pass.  
Who of the negroes hears,  
Nigh swears,  
‘ A church can ne’er be formed there.’  
Speak thou, O Lamb !  
Thou wert a curse for Ham.”

The following is wholly incomprehensible to me ; but perhaps it may be full of pious beauty to some Christian soul :

“ Let God Father’s Daughter-in-law throbbing  
By this sound but touched be,  
She awakes, tho’ love her breath half stopping,  
Out of her deep liturgy,  
To the blood and water which once spouted  
From that body’s temple now saluted ;  
And lo ! his own heart’s canal  
Blood in the cov’nant cup lets fall.  
With what suffrage of celestial voices  
Does *afflavit animus* :  
Turn to bathing in the side’s abysses !  
Heavenly concert yet be dumb,

Till the corpse's bees have had full measure,  
 Their rose garden traversing at leisure  
 With a glad and balmy hum,  
*Ave ! Latus saucium !*

Who "God Father's Daughter-in-law" may be, and why she throbs, there is nothing to show. I give it up. Well may these Christians pray, in a litany to Jesus :

"Thy meritorious not knowing things  
 Bridle our curiosity !  
 Thy surprising simplicity  
 Make us loath reasoning !

It needs a simplicity very surprising to sing the above.

Another class of hymns is rather difficult to deal with, being piously indelicate to a remarkable extent. Some of these are quite unprintable in these pages, for they need much faith to purify them, and I fear our readers might not all have sufficient. Some idea of these may be gained from the moderately—*very* moderately—decent ones subjoined. The ruling idea is that of the marriage between Christ and his Church, and no kind of delicacy is felt as to details. It is instructive to note how nearly allied are spirituality and sensuality, and how easily love of God slips into the latter. More refined examples of the same curious fact may be found in books of devotion of the present High Church school. Here the feeling is coarser :

"What an unction the Lamb's wife  
 Feels within her body,  
 When God's blood, the sap of life,  
 With its powers is ready.  
 Tender shudd'ring of her frame,  
 Which the mortal members  
 For full union with the Lamb  
 Apt and able renders."

"I still perceive his spousal bliss,  
 Dear hearts ! I feel ; but how it is,  
 Now my dear husband me has bless'd,  
 Cannot in words be well express'd ;  
 He loved me, O ! so deep,  
 I should be still asleep

And I already count the days,  
 To be again so blessed,  
 So greeted, so embraced."

"Thousand Magd'len kisses, Lamb and Saviour  
Take from me, from head to feet all over ;  
All thy skin, each pore and hair,  
Take of my salutes its share."

Any sort of comment on these would be superfluous, and they are gems of purity compared with many in the collection.

The marriage theory laid down in this book is curious and is worth noting. In a long marriage hymn it is explained that, "ere sex did rise," God had chosen all souls to be "his alone," and of them he is "the Lord and husband ;" but as this betrothal could only be "in faith" until after death, God divided his bride into two, and sent her forth into the world as male and female ; but as all souls are the bride of Christ, the human husbands are only Christ's representatives, and

"Our present proxy-marriages  
Are done in Jesu's holy name."

The male sex appears to end at death, and—not being godly—I do not find the language used very attractive : the suggestions conveyed by it are—to the ungodly—simply revolting.

When this book was issued, the compiler asked :

"Should an Historiographer  
Arise some future day,  
Who all events and men with care  
Would in just light display,  
And should his theme church matters be  
Of the now current century,"

would he take as a guide such a book as this we have been turning over? If so, thinks our writer,

"He'll find a sav'ry store,  
Which he with rapture can imbibe.  
If he's a heav'n instructed scribe."

Not being a "heav'n instructed scribe," I cannot say that I find the book very "savory ;" but I do find it very instructive. No sect of the present day would condescend to use these hymns. Even Moody and Sankey, nasty as they are in their praises of "the blood," would turn away in disgust from these coarse gloatings over it. The most uneducated Christian would not now venture to sing these amorous canticles to the God whom he worships. The



whole tone of the age would make it impossible for any congregation to reprint and use some of these hymns. Christianity, spite of itself, is moulded by the civilisation in the midst of which it lives.

It is useful to glance back and see the progress that has been made, even during the course of one brief century. As science has advanced it has raised the whole tone of society, and, with the society, has raised the Christianity. The thoughtful, pure, intellectual Christianity of a Stanley would, three hundred years ago, have been branded as heresy, and would have been expiated at the stake. To-day, Christians are angry if some of their old beliefs are dragged out of the congenial darkness in which they hide. As education progresses, the same process will be repeated, and some of the coarser doctrines left will also be covered with darkness, and the Christians of fifty years hence will look back at them with the shame and the disgust with which educated Christians of to-day regard these hymns of a century ago. Freethinkers who attack Christian doctrines are only born a century or so too soon, and may fight on fearlessly, knowing that time is on their side.

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## THE TRUE BASIS OF MORALITY.

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IN these stirring times of inquiry, when everything is put to the test, and is required to show its *raison d'être*, when the very existence of the Deity is questioned, or even denied, when the authority of the Bible is criticised, and by many rejected, when the old landmarks are being torn up, and there has not yet been time to root the new ones firmly in their places, there is a serious, and a very real, danger, that morality itself will for a time go down in the struggle, and will be trampled under foot by the combatants. It therefore becomes the duty of everyone who fights in the ranks of Freethought, and who ventures to attack the dogmas of the Churches, and to strike down the superstitions which enslave men's intellect, to beware how he uproots sanctions of morality which he is too weak to replace, or how, before he is prepared with better ones, he removes the barriers which do yet, however poorly, to some extent check vice and repress crime. In every revolution, be it political or religious, a grave responsibility rests on the leaders of the movement; if they venture to break the fetters which restrain the violent, and thus help to protect the weak, they must be prepared to afford safeguards which will continue to preserve society from anarchy, while they shall be free from the disadvantages of the restraints that have been destroyed. The leaders who strike down, but cannot build up, who can lead their followers to victory in the field, but cannot preserve order after the conquest, show that they are weak for the task they have ventured to begin, and the weakness which results in misery to others is no longer a pardonable frailty—it is a crime. That which touches morality touches the heart of society; a high and pure morality is the life-blood of humanity; mistakes in belief are inevitable, and are of little moment; mistakes in life destroy happiness, and their destructive consequences spread far and wide. It is then a very important question whether we, who are endeavouring

to take away from the world the authority on which has hitherto been based all its morality, can offer a new and firm ground whereupon may safely be built up the fair edifice of a noble life.

We ought, however, to start with a clearly-defined idea of what we mean by the word *morality*. Morality, in the usual acceptation of the term, is nothing more than obedience to certain arbitrary and conventional rules, rules which do not lie in the nature of things, and which do not appeal to the surrounding system of law for their authority; they are supernatural, not natural. But morality, in the deeper and truer meaning of the word, means harmony with natural order; *physical* morality is harmony with all those laws obedience to which results in physical vigour; and *moral* morality is harmony with all those laws obedience to which results in moral vigour. This definition really carries in it the whole gist of this essay, for if morality be harmony with law, the true basis of morality must necessarily be sought for in the study of law, as manifested in phenomena; but we will examine first the grounds of morality generally offered, before proceeding to test the new basis. These grounds are, authority and intuition.

During the past ages of the world morality has been based wholly on authority; it has drawn its sanctions from the supposed will of the gods or god; it has been rendered alluring by bribes of heaven and enforced by threats of hell. It is the favourite argument of the upholders of a supernatural revelation, that we deprive them of all sure resting-place if we do not base morality on the revealed will of God, and they assert that those who reject the Bible have not, and cannot have, any "settled standard of morality." It is just as if it had been said at the beginning of the present century to the students of the newly-born science of geology: "You must take care where you are drifting to; certain truths about the formation of the world are revealed to you in the Bible, and on this sure ground you must build your geological theories; if you desert it, you may indeed discover a few isolated facts, but you will be wandering about in a labyrinth without a clue; you will have no 'settled standard' of geological truth." If geologists had deferred to this reasoning, geology would have been stifled at its birth; yet there was truth in what was urged. If they cast their boat off from its Bible moorings they would go sailing off into the ocean of the unknown; they would have no "settled standard" to try their conclusions by; they

would have to be content to collect facts patiently, to collate them carefully, to reason from them, to reach conclusions slowly : only, when the conclusions were reached, they were sure, they were positive, they were true. The fact is, that while our opponents are perfectly right in saying that we shall have no "settled standard" to appeal to if we give up the Bible, they are perfectly wrong in thinking that a "settled standard" is a valuable thing to have. We only lose a thing which is not only useless to us, but which is positively injurious, because it acts as a barrier to inquiry and discussion. There is no such thing as a settled standard of knowledge allowed in science; our utmost scientific achievements are not the measure of future attainments. Every newly-discovered fact, every assured advance, is not an approach to a "settled standard," but is only a vantage ground from which to scale new heights. Science is progressive; it knows no limits save the limits of human thought; it owns no bounds, save the iron boundary of the unknowable. If morality, like geology, and like every other department of human thought, is to have the gyves of revelation struck from off its limbs, it must be removed from the basis of authority, and be transferred *wholly* to the basis of science. But science takes nothing for granted; it permits no assumptions to be reasoned from as though they were facts; it studies phenomena only, and from phenomena it reasons up to laws. If moralists desire to construct a morality which will bear all assaults unshaken, and which can maintain its ground against hostile criticism, they must be content to give up their heaven-born theories, and to walk humbly in the path of the study of earth-born phenomena; they must follow the scientific method, and must be able to demonstrate the solidity of every position they take up. Hitherto morality has floated in the air, and has been supposed to be sustained there by cords let down from heaven; henceforth it must descend and tread firmly on the ground, so that it may grow into the ruler, the king, of men.

It is obvious to every careful and intelligent student of the Bible, that the morality laid down in that collection of ancient Jewish writings is not susceptible of being formed into a code of laws, which should throughout be consistent with each other. In fact, the Bible itself offers us numerous "standards of morality," some high, some low; varying, for instance, between the gross immorality practised by the "man after God's own heart," to the pure life and teachings of that "Son of man" in whom the Father was "well

pleased." This variety is inevitable from the nature of the case, for the books were written at long intervals of time ; they incorporate many of the ancient and impure traditions of the early ages of the world, and they reflect, one after another, the gradual purification and civilisation of the people of whose literature they form the most important part. There is, therefore, nothing to be surprised at in the varying morality of the Bible ; rather, it is just what was to be expected. And this has been seen in another light by liberal Christian commentators, and the most thoughtful Christian students have pointed out that the revelation of God's will given in the Bible is a gradual revelation, because of the "hardness of men's hearts," and that the light had to win its way slowly through the heavy clouds of human ignorance and folly. The morality of Genesis is lower than that of Romans, and the law of Moses is far inferior to the moral code attributed to Jesus of Nazareth. The fact of the supercession of the Jewish polity, and the installation in its room of the "kingdom of heaven," whose principles are sketched out in the Sermon on the Mount, shows that the morality of the Bible is not at one with itself throughout, but is essentially progressive and ascending. It is well to notice this, although I would not for a moment be understood to mean, that personally I attach any weight to the systems of morality found in the Bible, above that which is due to all honest efforts of human thought ; but in order to see that, although their own book sanctions moral growth, yet Christians are inconsistent enough to check the moral development of the race at the death of the immediate followers of Jesus. Here they build up a barrier over which morality for ever may not pass ; here they mould an iron casing, beyond which morality may never grow. The deeds and thoughts stamped with the signet of Jesus and his Apostles are to be, for evermore, the highest virtues of morality ; those, on the other hand, on which they frowned, are to be, for evermore, reprobated and accursed. If, however, morality is to be accepted on authority *at all*, it seems necessary to admit the soundness of the Christian position, and to allow that the tides of human morality can never rise higher than they did in Judæa eighteen hundred years ago. To the Western nations no moral authority is so venerable as that of the Bible, and no other book has so great a prescriptive claim on our obedience. If we reject this authority, there is no other authority to which we can logically defer ; we may struggle to make good our footing on some other

round of the ladder, but if we are not strong enough to mount to the embattled tower of reason, we must ultimately fall backwards into the yawning gulf of absolute submission. Only those who take as their guide knowledge instead of faith, those who submit to no authority *quâ* authority, but bow solely to the dictates of reason, those only have a right to reject the Bible as a moral teacher; there is no logical standpoint between entire submission to authority, and entire freedom of judgment; our opponents are continually urging this on waverers as a threat, and we re-iterate the assertion as a deliberate and solemn warning; we had better quietly accept whatever is presented to us for our homage with a fair show of authority, if we are not prepared to take the trouble to "prove *all* things," and to follow, at whatever pain, the guiding torch borne in the hand of Free Thought.

There exists a school of religionists who found morality on what poor Charles Lamb used to call "some awkward process of intuition." This school has something in common with the two opposing parties of submission and of freedom, but it has the strong points of neither. It claims that there is in man a certain faculty called the "moral sense," which is the God-given arbiter of right and wrong, and is the true authority in matters of morality; and it also claims freedom for the individual to follow his own moral sense, and to be judged by that. That the moral sense exists, may be taken as one of the facts of consciousness, and we will presently inquire what it is, and whence it arises; but we must see whether this sense is a safe guide in matters of morality, and whether intuition may be trusted. If morality be in harmony with natural order, if there be a law outside ourselves by conformity to which moral health and strength can alone be secured, it follows necessarily that a knowledge of this law cannot be arrived at by any process of intuition. All laws, if they exist at all, reveal their existence through the phenomenal effects they produce, and it is by careful observation of these phenomena that we discover the law which guides them; in fact, what we call "laws" are nothing more in reality than the observed succession of phenomena, a succession which is invariable, so far as our observation has extended. But an objective law cannot be reached by the subjective process of intuition; it is as unreasonable to hope to discover a moral law through intuition, as to hope thus to discover a physical law. No true advance was made in physics until men gave up guessing, and began to study



facts ; and no true advance will be made in morals until the same plan be pursued. It seems, however, a waste of time to bring proofs of this, because one fatal defect promptly disposes of the claims of intuition as a safe and reliable basis for morality. Intuition, or moral instinct, to be of any real value, must be fairly universal in its testimony ; but intuitionality morality is as variable as the various nations of the earth. It depends on civilisation, on custom, on habit ; intuition does not speak *one* moral language, it speaks in many tongues ; it varies its dictates according to the use of the people. That which is moral to the Thug is hideous immorality to the European ; the highest virtue of the one is the worst crime of the other. It has been seriously urged that, if the Thug lived up to the light within him, he would no longer sacrifice to his terrible goddess ; but it is very difficult to see why the European should lay down *his* intuition as the rule of morality, if he maintains that intuition is a universal gift to all from the Father of Spirits. To say that intuition is God's voice in the soul of man, and then to exalt one set of intuitions as the rule for the world, is simply to juggle with words, and to set up a new *authority* on the pedestal whence the old has been taken down. It is a new "thus saith the Lord," without the venerable age of the Bible to recommend it, without the sanction of ages, or the tender memories of childhood and home ; and yet it threatens to usurp over men's souls an authority as absolute as that of the supernatural revelation, an authority which is already impatient of opposition and arrogant, in self-assertion. Who is to decide on the true morality, when so many claimants start up, all basing their right to be heard on the fact that they are the voice of intuition ? If the reason and the judgment are to be called in to decide between them, a hard blow is struck at the idea that intuition is the voice of God, speaking in the soul of man. For if one intuition be pronounced to speak justly, then all other intuitions, speaking at variance with it, must be held to be false ; and the reason and judgment of one man will choose differently from the reason and judgment of his neighbour ; and so there will be many divine voices, contradicting each other, a result not consonant either with reason or with reverence. Besides, if intuition deceives our fellow creatures on all sides, are we wise, or even safe, in trusting it in our own cases ? Is there any particular reason why *our* intuition should be *the* intuition ? Against this party the Christian has always ready to his hand the crushing retort, that in-

tuitive morality varies according to the customs of various races, and, if no surer basis for morality can be found than the shifting sands of intuition, the Bible is, after all, the safer guide of the two, because the more intelligible to the mass. The real truth is, that intuition is only the result of transmitted moral tendencies; it is a conveniently vague word under which to group certain movements of the mind, which are governed by laws at present unknown to us. Instinct—and intuition is only moral instinct—is, so far as we yet know, a tendency to do certain actions without thought, and this tendency arises from our ancestors having done these actions for generation after generation, until the doing became a habit, transmitted from parent to child. Instinct is the accumulated experience of the race impressed upon the brain of the yet unborn creature, and moulding many of its habits before any personal thought or experience comes in. And so intuition, or the moral sense, is the accumulated moral experience of the race, and is transmitted to the individual with his outward frame; this experience varies with the race, and thus it happens that the moral instinct of the Thug differs so widely from that of the European; the previous experience of his ancestors is different from that of the ancestors of the European, and just as he receives a different *physique*, so does he receive a different *morale*. Instinct varies with the experience of those through whom it is transmitted, and intuition, however poetically it may be described, or however artistically it may be gilded, is nothing more than moral instinct, subject to all the laws which guide instinct throughout the world. The moral sense, as found in the European, and as cultured by the highest existing civilisation, is doubtless generally—though by no means universally—a fair guide to right and wrong. But the utmost the moral sense can do towards forming a true science of morality, is to offer a good working hypothesis round which facts may conveniently be grouped, which hypothesis must ultimately be disproved or verified, according to its disagreement or agreement with the result of the collated facts.

It is convenient to notice here a slight mental confusion sometimes arising as to the province of the moral faculty, commonly called Conscience. It is often said that Conscience directs man to hate evil, and to love good. There is considerable confusion of thought in this idea. Conscience does not enable a man to discern between good

and evil: the decision as to the morality or immorality of an action is made by the reason, whether that reason be enlightened or unenlightened. All that conscience does is to urge the man to follow that which the reason declares to be right. When the brain has declared "such and such a thing is good," then the conscience says, "do it." If the reason judge falsely, the conscience will then point to the *wrong* action as a duty, and thus it has happened that some of the worst actions in the world have been done at the command of conscience. The most cruel persecutions have been carried out with perfect conscientiousness, and priests, with streaming eyes and bleeding hearts, have burned heretics to the "greater glory of God." Conscience is not a safe guide—in fact, it is no guide at all; it is not the eye which chooses the path, but the foot which blindly carries us wherever the brain directs.

If authority and intuition both fail us, to what are we to turn? There is only one ground left to us—a humble ground, but a very sure one; a ground called cold by some, but found by those who build thereon to be warm with the sunshine of Truth; a ground called hard and dry by some, but found by those who labour on it to be covered with the fragrant violet flowers of rewarded labour, to be softened by gentle showers from heaven, on whose falling drops glisten the rays of the rising sun, making them glow with the fairy hues of the rainbow-arch of Hope. The true basis of morality is utility; that is, the adaptation of our actions to the promotion of the general welfare and happiness, the endeavour so to rule our life that we may serve and bless mankind. Through the scientific method only can the true rules of morality be discovered, and an irrefragable answer returned to all questionings concerning right and wrong. The first step towards building up a science of morality is to collect facts, and as in other sciences facts are collected by the observation of surrounding phenomena, so must moral facts be collected by the observation of moral phenomena, facts in sociology, recorded in history. We must find out, by careful analysis, what courses have tended most to the advancement and ennoblement of society; we must trace out the results of various lines of conduct, and see which have best promoted the general welfare of the race. That which promotes the general happiness is right; that which lessens or undermines the general happiness is wrong. These are the axioms on which a true morality must be grounded.

The selection of the production of happiness as the ultimate test of right and wrong, is a theory of morals which is objected to by many, who desire to cling to a transcendental philosophy, and who cry out that to aim at happiness only is a low and despicable rule of life. Miss Frances Power Cobbe, one of the best-known leaders of the Theistic and intuitional school, especially combats the idea that men should so direct their conduct as to make the securing of happiness their ultimate end: virtue, she protests, is the end for which moral and intelligent beings should live. We will not follow her through the somewhat strange logic by which she proves that moral and finite beings must necessarily be imperfect, or ask how it comes to pass that, although two infinities are "mathematically impossible," it is yet possible that infinite and finite can exist together; these questions, however interesting, do not involve the point to which we wish to draw attention. She urges that virtue and not happiness is the true aim of life, and we challenge her to show that by aiming at what she calls virtue, she is not really aiming at happiness. For what is virtue but the highest good, and the keenest gratification attainable by man? When she urges that men should be ready to undergo suffering, and to encounter trial and pain, in order to be true to themselves, and to do good to others, she is in reality only bidding us to resign lower pleasures for higher ones, selfish pleasures for unselfish, physical pleasures for moral. Opponents of utilitarianism generally fall into the error of speaking of the happiness which is set forward as the criterion of morality, as though it only included the lower kinds of pleasure and animal enjoyment. But the happiness which is intended by utilitarians includes every possible phase of physical, mental, and moral enjoyment. Miss Cobbe ought not to fall into this common misrepresentation, for she begins by rightly defining happiness as the gratification of all the desires of our nature: she then somewhat oddly argues that happiness cannot be the true end of life, because we must often resign some of the desires of our nature in order to do right. If utilitarians aimed at securing perfect happiness, which is impossible, her arguments would have some force, but as they only aim at securing the greatest attainable amount of happiness, this portion of her strictures falls to the ground. She then drops the true definition of happiness out of sight, and always afterwards speaks of "happiness" as though it consisted only of sensual and material gratification. She considers that

virtue and happiness are antithetic, and that they clash when virtue "bids us suffer hunger and cold that we may feed and clothe others," oblivious of the truth that generous self-sacrifice affords a keener and a fuller pleasure than sensual gratification. Although a virtuous man may renounce some *material* enjoyment in order to do right, or to aid others, yet in that very renunciation he wins a *moral* happiness greater than the resigned material one. Thus it is perfectly consonant with utility to resign a physical enjoyment for a mental exertion, or to give up a personal gratification for the keener and nobler pleasure of doing a kindness to another. To do a virtuous action at the cost of material suffering, is really to aim at a purer pleasure than the pleasure resigned; it is to climb higher up on the mountain of happiness, to an elevation where the air is brighter and more exhilarating.

Carefully analysed, the aiming at virtue is the aiming at happiness; all things that cause happiness are naturally desirable to us, and we "desire" virtue. Why? Surely because virtue is an indispensable part of all true and solid happiness. Happiness cannot exist without virtue, because a virtuous action is an action that tends to the benefit of society, or to some special part of society; and to say that an action tends to the benefit of society, is the same thing as saying that it tends to the happiness of society. Miss Cobbe might retort that she desires virtue, not in order that she may be happy, but because by being virtuous she pleases God. But why does she desire to please God? Is it not *because* in so doing she finds her truest rest, her purest happiness? If a course of action she believed to be virtuous brought her not only material loss, but internal discomfort, if it hindered prayer, and clouded spiritual light, would she not immediately conclude that her judgment had erred, and that the *inner unhappiness proved that the course was a wrong one*? Unhappiness, like pain, is Nature's check to our mistakes, and her spur to our indolence. All that we desire, we desire because the gain of it will give us pleasure. Is any one so unnaturally constituted as to desire pain because it is pain? Even ascetics endure pain only in the hope of a thereby-won future bliss. We may submit to suffering willingly when it is the means to a greater good, a good which can only be attained through the suffering; but no one in the possession of their faculties selects undesirable—*i.e.*, unpleasant—things in preference to pleasant. So that all that the teachers who make virtue

the supreme end of life really tell us is, that when a lower and higher pleasure come into antagonism, we are to select the higher, and let the lower go—an opinion in which we are all perfectly agreed. But it is, after all, only reasonable that happiness should be the ultimate test of right and wrong, if we live, as we do, in a realm of law. Obedience to law must necessarily result in harmony, and disobedience in discord. But if obedience to law result in harmony, it must also result in happiness; for when our actions are in harmony with each other, and with our environment, they find nothing against which they can jar, and a feeling of satisfaction arises from the consciousness of this smooth working—*i.e.*, we feel happiness. All through nature obedience to law results in happiness, and through obedience each living thing fulfils the perfection of its being, and in that perfection finds its true happiness.

As unconsciously as M. Jourdain had been speaking prose all his life, so have societies of men based their morality on utility. As men grew out of utter barbarism, and began to form a society, certain laws became necessary to keep that society together. The good of the whole had to be considered, and arrangements had to be made for its promotion. On what were these laws based except on utility? Murder and theft were forbidden. Why? Because the half-savage citizen's intuitions were against them? Not at all; but because men could not live together in security if these things were allowed. Lying became a sin, because it was found to destroy all confidence between man and man, and because confidence was necessary for the successful and convenient carrying on of work. The distinction between virtue and vice has been gradually evolved, through one course of action being proved to be beneficial, and the contrary course being proved to be hurtful to society. The very intuitions on which some modern religionists pride themselves, were primarily based on the utility they despise. By the sharp test of "the survival of the fittest," certain actions have been stamped as good, others as bad. We, "heirs of the ages" gone before, inherit those habit-views of right and wrong, which the moral experience of mankind has proved to be, roughly speaking, for the good of the community. Our task now is to correct these "rough and ready" views of morality by a just and careful revision, to sift and systematise the facts which lie ready to our hand, and to carefully collect and collate other moral phenomena. From these collected and collated facts must be deduced the

laws of morality, which, based on undeniable phenomena, will have all the certainty that science, and science alone, can give. Scientific morality has this great advantage over both authoritative and intuitive, that it stands on firm, unassailable ground; new facts will alter its details, but they can never touch its method; like all other sciences it is at once positive and progressive. Of course, in regarding its bearing on happiness as the true criterion of the morality of any given course, utilitarians consider the general rather than the individual good. A course of conduct is right or wrong according as it promotes, or injures, the *general* happiness. No scientific law can be based on a solitary phenomenon, and a law of morality must be grounded on a wide survey of that which tends to promote the welfare of society as a whole. It may often be found that individual happiness suffers by obedience to a law which yet promotes the well-being of the community, and it is therefore necessary not to jump too hastily to a conclusion that a given course is wrong, because, in some special case, an individual suffers by following it. Individual happiness would sometimes be promoted by a course which, if followed by all, would destroy the general happiness, and, in such a case, the individual must be sacrificed to the good of the many.

No accusation which has been levelled at Utilitarianism shows so entire an ignorance of its teaching as does the accusation that it inculcates—or at least nourishes—selfishness. Utility teaches that the *general* happiness is to be the aim of the individual. The criterion of an action of A.B. is not whether A.B. thereby secures or increases his own happiness, but whether the tendency of the action is beneficial or detrimental to society. If A.B. secures his own happiness by a course which injures others, or which, if generally pursued, would be prejudicial to the interests of the community, he is at once condemned by the principles of utility, even although he may have thereby increased his own individual happiness. Mr. J. S. Mill justly remarks that the standard of Utilitarianism “is not the agent’s own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether; and if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the world in general is immensely the gainer by it.” It is one of the great merits of Utilitarianism that it cultivates the social feelings, and tends to bind men into a brotherhood, wherein the good of all is the aim of each.

The new morality will indeed lessen individual suffering by removing some foolish and conventional restrictions which now exist—restrictions which sacrifice individual happiness without thereby ensuring some greater social good. There is, at present, a large amount of individual suffering caused by the accepted and arbitrary system of morality, which is productive of no wider happiness; and, being unnecessary, is therefore unjust. Utility would allow to each individual every possible freedom of development, and every facility for ensuring his private happiness, which did not conflict with the welfare of society, or trench on the rights of others. But its moral laws will be the more rigid and the sterner because they will be based on facts. Law *is* rigid. All Nature's laws are stern; but it is utterly futile to fight against them, and to cry out that they are cruelly inexorable. When, by careful study of facts, by keen analysis of the consequences of actions, by wide surveys of the happiness and unhappiness caused by opposite courses of conduct, moralists are able to say that such and such deeds are right, and such and such are wrong, the wise will accommodate themselves to the laws which surround them, and adapt themselves to the necessary conditions of their being. Moral laws exist just as much as do physical laws; and even as inquiry into physical laws has enabled us to combat disease, and to spread health and comfort, so will inquiry into moral laws enable us to heal society of the terrible evils with which it is afflicted.

But if a law must not be based on a single fact, neither must it be drawn hastily from *passing* phenomena. The individual may snatch at a temporary good, which would promote his present, at the cost of his future, welfare; thus a man commits excesses in food or drink, and thereby ruins his physical powers; or he is sensual and destroys his health. No course of conduct can be more contrary to the utilitarian code of morality. The agent has actually sacrificed permanent health and strength for the gratification of passing impulses. Instead of aiming at the greatest possible happiness, he has grasped at the poorest and most fleeting.

It will doubtless be remarked that in the ground which is suggested in this essay, as the true basis of morality, no reference whatever has been made to the supposed will of God as a Moral Governor, or to any idea of pleasing him. The omission is made deliberately and intentionally. Round the idea of God rages, at the present day, much fierce debate; the nature and existence of God are problems



which are keenly investigated and hotly disputed over. Most schools of thought agree that the existence of God is not demonstrable; many of our deepest thinkers reject altogether the orthodox and semi-orthodox idea of God. Men and women, who have mental and moral courage enough to face this gravest of all questions, find themselves compelled to renounce, one by one, all the notions of the Deity which once they held. They see that the attributes ascribed to him by Christian and devout Theist, are but magnified human attributes, the gigantic mist-shadow formed by the human figure. They are forced to allow that will, personality, intelligence, consciousness, are nothing but human imperfections and limitations, which, projected into boundless space, and dignified by the title of infinite, are bound up together into one ideal heroic figure, and baptised with the name of God. Sober thinkers acknowledge humbly that the mind cannot transcend itself, that every conception which we form, and every image that we create, are necessarily limited by the capabilities of our faculties, and conditioned by our consciousness.

As, then, the grave subject of the existence of the Deity is a matter of dispute, it is evidently of deep importance to society that morality should not be dragged into this battlefield, to stand or totter with the various theories of the Divine Nature which human thought creates and destroys. If we can found morality on a basis apart from theology, we shall do humanity a service which can scarcely be overestimated. The moment we base morality on the supposed will of a Being whose very existence is not demonstrable, that moment we remove it from a solid, scientific basis, and cast it on the foaming waves of theological disputation, to be tossed hither and thither with the ebb and flow of the tide. The basis of morality suggested in this essay is purely phenomenal; it is ruled by laws whose workings can be traced; and I affirm that these laws are sufficient for our guidance, and that there is nothing to be gained by building on an unknown ground when a known and firm ground is under our feet. Our faculties do not suffice to tell us about God; they do suffice to study phenomena, and to deduce laws from correlated facts. Surely, then, we should do wisely to concentrate our strength and our energies on the discovery of the attainable, instead of on the search after the unknowable. If we are told that morality consists in obedience to the supposed will of a supposed perfectly moral Being, and that we are to aim at righteous-

ness of life, because in so doing we please God, then we are at once placed in a region where our faculties are useless to us, and where our judgment is at fault. But if we are told that we are to lead noble lives, because nobility of life is desirable for itself alone, because in so doing we are acting in harmony with the laws of Nature around us, because in so doing we spread happiness around our pathway, and gladden our fellow men—then indeed motives are appealed to which spring forward to meet the call, and chords are struck in our hearts which respond in music to the touch.

Christian morality has had its turn; and the present state of society, its crying shames, its cruel sufferings, tell us that authoritative morality has failed. Intuition gives us no hope for the masses, the uncultured, the despised, who have no intuitions, beyond the blind yearning for a change which will bring them some gleam of hope, or at least some lightening of despair. Surely it is time, then, that we should bestir ourselves to place morality on some firm basis before the lowering storm breaks over our heads, and sweeps us and our present feeble structure away. Amid the fervid movement of society, with its wild theories and crude social reforms, with its righteous fury against oppression, and its unconsidered notions of wider freedom and gladder life, it is of vital importance that morality should stand on a foundation unshakeable; that so through all political and religious revolutions human life may grow purer and nobler, may rise upwards into settled freedom, and not sink downwards into anarchy. Only utility can afford us a sure basis, the reasonableness of which will be accepted alike by thoughtful student and hard-headed artisan. Utility appeals to all alike, and sets in action motives which are found equally in every human heart. Well shall it be for humanity that creeds and dogmas pass away, that superstition vanishes, and the clear light of freedom and science dawns on a regenerated earth—but well only if men draw tighter and closer the links of trustworthiness, of honour, and of truth. Equality before the law is necessary and just; liberty is the birthright of every man and woman; free individual development will elevate and glorify the race. But little worth these priceless jewels, little worth liberty and equality, with all their promise for mankind, little worth even wider happiness, if that happiness be selfish, if true fraternity, true brotherhood, do not knit man to man, and heart to heart, in loyal service to the common need, and generous self-sacrifice to the common good.

# IS THE BIBLE INDICTABLE?

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BY

ANNIE BESANT.

BEING AN ENQUIRY WHETHER THE BIBLE COMES  
WITHIN THE RULING OF THE LORD CHIEF  
JUSTICE AS TO OBSCENE LITERATURE.



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# IS THE BIBLE INDICTABLE?

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AN ENQUIRY WHETHER THE BIBLE COMES WITHIN  
THE RULING OF THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE  
AS TO OBSCENE LITERATURE.

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THE ruling of Sir Alexander Cockburn in the late trial, the Queen *against* Bradlaugh and Besant, seems to involve wider issues than the Lord Chief Justice intended, or than the legal ally of Nature and Providence can desire. The question of motive is entirely set on one side; the purest motives are valueless if the information conveyed is such as is capable of being turned to bad purposes by the evil-minded and the corrupt. This view of the law would not be enforced against expensive medical works; provided that the price set on a book be such as shall keep it out of reach of the "common people," its teaching may be thoroughly immoral but it is not obscene. Dr. Fleetwood Churchill, for instance, is not committing an indictable offence by giving directions as to the simplest and easiest way of procuring abortion; he is not committing a misdemeanour, although he points out means which any woman could obtain and use for herself; he does not place himself within reach of the law, although he recommends the practice of abortion in all cases where previous experience proves that the birth of a living child is impossible. A check to population which destroys life is thus passed over as legal, perhaps because the destruction of life is the check so largely employed by Nature and Providence, and would thus ensure the approval of the Solicitor-General. But the real reason why Dr. Churchill is left unmolested and Dr. Knowlton is assailed, lies in the difference of the price at which the two are severally published. If Dr. Knowlton was

sold at 10s. 6d. and Dr. Churchill at 6d., then the vials of legal wrath would have descended on the advocate of abortion and not on the teacher of prevention. The obscenity lies, to a great extent, in the price of the book sold. A vulgar little sixpence is obscene, a dainty half-sovereign is respectable. Poor people must be content to remain ignorant, or to buy the injurious quack treatises circulated in secret; wealthier people, who want knowledge less, are to be protected by the law in their purchases of medical works, but if poor people, in sore need, finding "an undoubted physician" ready to aid them, venture to ask for his work, written especially for them, the law strikes down those who sell them health and happiness. They must not complain; Nature and Providence have placed them in a state of poverty, and have mercifully provided for them effectual, if painful, checks to population. The same element of price rules the decency or the indecency of pictures. A picture painted in oils, life size, of the naked human figure, such as Venus disrobed for the bath, or Phryne before her judges, or Perseus and Andromeda, exhibited to the upper classes, in a gallery, with a shilling admission charge, is a perfectly decent and respectable work of art. Photographs of those pictures, uncoloured, and reduced in size, are obscene publications, and are seized as such by the police. Cheapness is, therefore, an essential part of obscenity.

If a book be cheap, what constitutes it an obscene book? Lord Campbell, advocating in Parliament the Act against obscene literature which bears his name, laid down very clearly his view of what should, legally, be an obscene work. It must be a work "written for the single purpose of corrupting the morals of youth, and of a nature calculated to shock the feelings of decency in any well-regulated mind" (Hansard, vol. 146, No. 2, p. 329). The law, according to him, was never to be levelled even against works which might be considered immoral and indecent, such as some of those of Dryden, Congreve, or Rochester. "The keeping, or the reading, or the delighting in such things must be left to taste, and was not a subject for legal interference;" the law was only to interpose where the motive of the seller was bad; "when there were people who designedly and industriously manufactured books and prints with the intention of corrupting the public morals, and when they succeeded in their infamous purpose, he thought it was

necessary for the legislature to interpose" (Hansard, vol. 146, No. 4, p. 865).

The ruling of the present Lord Chief Justice in the late trial is in direct opposition to the view taken by Lord Campbell. The chief says: "Knowlton goes into physiological details connected with the functions of the generation and procreation of children. The principles of this pamphlet, with its details, are to be found in greater abundance and distinctness in numerous works to which your attention has been directed, and, having these details before you, you must judge for yourselves whether there is anything in them which is calculated to excite the passions of man and debase the public morals. If so, every medical work is open to the same imputation" (Trial, p. 261). The Lord Chief Justice then refers to the very species of book against which Lord Campbell said that he directed his Act. "There are books," the chief says, "which have for their purpose the exciting of libidinous thoughts, and are intended to give to persons who take pleasure in that sort of thing the impure gratification which the contemplation of such thoughts is calculated to give." If the book were of that character it "would be condemnable," and so far all are agreed as to the law. But Sir Alexander Cockburn goes further, and here is the danger of his interpretation of the law: "Though the intention is not unduly to convey this knowledge, and gratify prurient and libidinous thoughts, still, if its effect is to excite and create thoughts of so demoralising a character to the mind of the reader, the work is open to the condemnation asked for at your hands" (Trial, p. 261). Its effect on what reader? Suppose a person of prurient mind buys Dr. Carpenter's "Human Physiology," and reads the long chapter, containing over 100 pages, wholly devoted to a minute description of generation; the effect of the reading will be "to excite and create thoughts of" the "demoralising character" spoken of. According to the Lord Chief Justice's ruling, Dr. Carpenter's would then become an obscene book. The evil motive is transferred from the buyer to the seller, and then the seller is punished for the buyer's bad intent; vicarious punishment seems to have passed from the church into the law court. There can be no doubt that every medical book now comes under the head of "obscene literature," for they may all be read by impure people, and will infallibly have the affect of arousing prurient thoughts; that they are written for a good purpose, that they are written to cure disease, is

no excuse; the motive of the writer must not be considered; the law has decided that books whose intention is to convey physiological knowledge, and that not unduly, are obscene, if the reader's passions chance to be aroused by them; "we must not listen to arguments upon moral obligations arising out of any motive, or out of any desire to benefit humanity, or to do good to your species" (Trial, p. 237). The only protection of these, otherwise obscene, books lies in their price; they are generally highly-priced, and they do thus lack one essential element of obscenity. For the useful book that bad people make harmful must be cheap in order to be practically obscene; it must be within reach of the poor, and be "capable of being sold at the corners of the streets, and at bookstalls, to every one who has sixpence to spare" (Trial, p. 261).

The new ruling touches all the dramatists and writers that Lord Campbell had no idea of attacking; no one can doubt that many of Congreve's dramas are calculated to arouse sexual passion; these are sold at a very low price, and they have not even the defence of conveying any useful information; they come most distinctly within the ruling of the Lord Chief Justice; why are they to be permitted free circulation? Sterne, Fielding, Smollett, Swift, must all be flung into the dusthole after Congreve, Wycherley, Jonson; Dryden, of course, follows these without delay, and Spencer, with his "Faerie Queene," is the next victim. Shakespeare can have no quarter shown him; not only are most gross passages scattered through his works, but the motive of some of them is directly calculated to arouse the passions; for how many youthful love fevers is not "Romeo and Juliet" answerable; what of "Cymbeline," "Pericles," or "Titus Andronicus"? Can "Venus and Adonis" tend to anything except to the rousing of passion? is "Lucrece" not obscene? Yet Macmillan's Globe Edition of Shakespeare is regarded as one of the most admirable publishing efforts made by that eminent firm to put English masterpieces in the hands of the poor. Coming to our time, what is to be done with Byron? "Don Juan" is surely calculated to corrupt, not to speak of other poems, such as "Parisina." What of Shelley, with his "Cenci"? Swinburne, must of course, be burned at once. Every one of these great names is now branded as obscene, and under the ruling of the Lord Chief Justice every one of them must be condemned. Suppose some one should follow Hetherington's



example? Suppose that we should become the prosecutors instead of the prosecuted? Suppose that we should drag others to share our prison, and should bring the most honoured names of authors into the same condemnation that has struck us? Why should we show to others a consideration that has not been shown to us? If it is said that we should not strike, we answer; "Then leave *us* alone, and calculate the consequences before you touch us again." The law has been declared by the Lord Chief Justice of England; why is not that law as binding on Macmillan as on us? The law has been narrowed in order to enmesh Freethought: its net will catch other fishes as well, or else break under the strain and let all go free. The Christians desire to make two laws, and show their hands too plainly: one law is to be strict, and is to apply wholly to Freethinkers; cheating Christians, who sell even Knowlton, are to be winked at by the authorities, and are to be let off scot free; but this is not all. Ritualists circulate a book beside which Knowlton is said to be purity itself, and the law does not touch them; no warrants are issued for their apprehension; no prosecution is paid for by a hidden enemy; no law-officer of the Crown is briefed against them. Why is this? because to attack Christians is to draw attention to the foundation of Christianity; because to attack the "Priest in Absolution" is to attack Moses. The Christian walls are made out of Bible-glass, and they fear to throw stones lest they should break their own house. Listen to Mr. Ridsdale, a brother of the Holy Cross: "I wonder," he says, "why some one does not stand up in the House of Lords and bring a charge against the Bible (especially *Léviticus*) as an immoral book." The *Church Times*, the organ of the Ritualists, has a letter which runs thus: "Suppose a patrician and a pontifex in old Rome had with care and deliberation extracted sentences from Holy Writ, separated them from their context, suppressed the general nature and character of the book, and then accused the bishop and his clergy of deliberately preparing an obscene book to contaminate the young (how readily he might have made such extracts!), what should we have said of such ruffians?" This, then, is the shield of the clergy; the Bible is itself so obscene that Christians fear to prosecute priests who circulate obscenity.

Does the Bible come within the ruling of the Lord Chief Justice as to obscene literature? Most decidedly it does,

and if prosecuted as an obscene book, it must necessarily be condemned, if the law is justly administered. Every Christian ought therefore to range himself on our side, and demand a reversal of the present rule, for under it his own sacred book is branded as obscene, and may be prosecuted as such by any unbeliever.

First, the book is widely circulated at a low price. If the Bible were restricted in its circulation by being sold at 10s. 6d. or a guinea, it might escape being placed in the category of obscene literature under the present ruling. But no such defence can be pleaded for it. It is sold at 8d. a copy, printed on cheap paper, and strongly bound, for use in schools; it is given away by thousands among the "common people," whose morals are now so carefully looked after in the matter of books; it is presented to little children of both sexes, and they are told to read it carefully. To such an extent is this carried, that some thousands of children assembled together were actually told by Lord Sandon, the Vice-President of the Committee of Council on Education, to read the Bible right through from beginning to end, and were bidden not to pick and choose. The element of price is clearly against the Bible if it be proved to have in it anything which is of a nature calculated to suggest impure thoughts.

As to the motives of the writers, we need not trouble about them. The law now says that intention is nothing, and no desire to do good is any excuse for obscenity (Trial, p. 257).

There remains the vital question: is the effect of some of its passages to excite and create demoralising thoughts? (Trial, p. 261).

The difficulty of dealing with this question is that many of the quotations necessary to prove that the Bible comes under the ruling of the Lord Chief Justice are of such an extremely coarse and disgusting character, that it is really impossible to reproduce them without intensifying the evil which they are calculated to do. While I see no indecency in a plain statement of physiological facts, written for people's instruction, I do see indecency in coarse and indelicate stories, the reading of which can do no good to any human being, and can have no effect save that of corrupting the mind and suggesting unclean ideas. I therefore refuse to soil my pages with quotations, and content myself with giving the references, so that any-

one who desires to use the ruling of the Lord Chief Justice to suppress the Bible may see what certainty of success awaits him if justice be done. I shall not trouble about simple coarseness, such as Gen. iv. 1, 17, 25; Gen. vi. 4; or Matt. i. 18-20, 25. If mere coarseness of expression were to be noted, my task would be endless. But let the intending prosecutor read the following passages. A little boy of 8 or 10 would scarcely be improved by reading Gen. ix. 20-25; the drunkenness, indecency, and swearing in these six verses is surely calculated to corrupt the boy's mind. The teaching of Gen. xvi. 1-5 is scarcely elevating for the "common people," seeing the example set by the "friend of God." Gen. xvii. 10-14 and 23-27 is very coarse. Would Gen. xix. 4-9 improve a young maiden, or would it not suggest the most impure thoughts, verse 5 dealing with an idea that should surely never be put into a girl's mind? The same chapter, 30-38, is revolting; and Deut. ii. 9 and 19 implies God's approval of the unnatural crime. The ignorance of physiology which is thought best for girls would receive a shock, when in reading the Bible straight through, the day's portion comprised Gen. xxv., 21-26. Gen. xxvi., 8 is not nice, nor is Gen. xxix., 21-35, and Gen. xxx. The story of Dinah, Gen. xxxiv.; of Reuben, Gen. xxxv., 22; of Onan, Gen. xxxviii., 8-10; of Judah and Tamar, xxxviii., 13-26; of the birth of Tamar's children, xxxviii., 27-30, are all revolting in their foulness of phraseology. Why the Bible should be allowed to tell the story of Onan seems very strange, and the "righteousness" of Tamar (v. 26) wins approval. Is this thought purifying teaching for the "common people"? The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, Gen. xxxix., 7-18, I have heard read in church to the manifest discomfort of some of the congregation, and the amusement of others, while Joseph flying from temptation and leaving his garment with Potiphar's wife is a picture often seen in Sunday schools. Thus twelve out of the fifty chapters of Genesis are undeniably obscene, and if there is any justice in England, Genesis ought to be suppressed. We pass to Exodus. Ex. i., 15-19 is surely indecent. I am not dealing with immoral teaching, or God's blessing on the falsehood of the midwives (20, 21) would need comment. Ex. iv., 24-26, is very coarse; so also Ex. xxii., 16, 17, 19. Leviticus is coarse throughout, but is especially so in chaps. v., 3; xii.; xv.; xviii., 6-23; xx., 10-21; xxii., 3-5. The trial of jealousy is most revolting in Numb. v., 12-29.

Numb. xxv., 6-8 is hardly a nice story for a child, nor is that of Numb. xxxi., 17, 18. Deut. xxi., 10-14 is not pure teaching for soldiers. Deut. xxii., 13-21 is extremely coarse; the remainder of the chapter comes also within the Chief's ruling, as do also chaps. xxiii., 1, 10, 11; xxv., 11, 12; xxvii., 20, 22, 23; xxviii., 57. The fault of the book of Joshua lies chiefly in its exceeding brutality and bloodthirstiness, but it, also, does not quite escape the charge of obscenity, as may be seen by referring to the following passage: chap. v., 2-8. Judges is occasionally very foul, and is utterly unfit for general reading, according to the late definition; Ehud and Eglon, Judges, iii., 15-25, would not bear reading aloud, and the story might have been told equally well in decent language. Or take the horribly disgusting tale of the Levite and his concubine (Judges xix.), and then judge whether a book containing such stories is fit for use in schools. Dr. Carpenter's book may do good there, because, with all its plain speaking, it conveys useful information; but what good—mental, physical, or moral—can be done to a young girl by reading Judges xix.? And the harm done is intensified by the fact that the ignorance in which girls are kept surrounds such a story with unwholesome interest, as giving a glimpse into what is, to them, the great mystery of sex. The story of Ruth iii. 3-14 is one which we should not like to see repeated by our daughters; for the virtue of a woman who should wait until a man was drunk, and then go alone at night and lie down at his feet, would, in our days, be regarded as problematical. 1 Sam. ii. 22, and v. 9 are both obscene; so are 1 Sam. xviii. 25-27 and xxi. 4, 5. 1 Sam. xxv. 22, 34 are disgustingly coarse, and there are many similar coarse passages to be found in "holy" writ. 2 Sam. vi. 14, 16, 20, is a little over-suggestive, as is also 2 Sam. x. 4. The story of David dancing is told in 1 Chron. xv. 27-29 without anything offensive in its tone. The story of David and Bathsheba is only too well known, and as told in 2 Sam. xi. 2-13 is far more calculated to arouse the passions than is anything in Knowlton. The prophecy in 2 Sam. xii. 11, 12, fulfilled in xvi. 21, 22, is repulsive in the extreme, more especially when we are told that the shameful counsel was given by Ahithophel, whose counsel, "which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God." If God's oracles give such counsel, the less they are resorted to the better for the

welfare of the state. We are next given the odious story of Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam. xiii. 1—22), instructive for Lord Sandon's boys and girls to read together, as they go through the Bible from beginning to end. 1 Kings i. 1—4 conveys an idea more worthy of George IV. than of the man after God's own heart. In 1 Kings xiv. 10, the coarseness is inexcusable, and verse 24 is only too intelligible after Judges xix. 2 Kings ix. 8, xviii. 27, are thoroughly Biblical in their delicacy. 1 Chron. xix. 4 repeats the unpleasant story of 2 Sam. x. 4; but both 1 and 2 Chronicles are, for the Bible, remarkably free from coarseness, and are a great improvement on the books of Kings and Samuel. The same praise is deserved by Ezra and Nehemiah. The tone of the story of Esther is somewhat sensual throughout: the drunken king commanding Vashti to come in and show her beauty, Esther i. 11; the search for the young virgins, Esther ii. 2—4; the trial and choice, Esther ii. 12—17, these are scarcely elevating reading; Esther vii. 8 is also coarse. To a girl whose safety is in her ignorance, Job iii. 11 is very plain. Psalm xxxviii. 5—7 gives a description of a certain class of disease in exact terms. Proverbs v. 17—20 is good advice, but would be condemned by the Lord Chief Justice; Proverbs vi. 24—32 is of the same character, as is also Proverbs vii. 5—23. The allusion in Ecclesiastes xi. 5 would be objected to as improper by the Solicitor-General.

The Song of Solomon is a marriage-song of the sensual and luxuriant character: put Knowlton side by side with it, and then judge which is most calculated to arouse the passions. It is almost impossible to select, where all is of so extreme a character, but take i. 2, 13; ii. 4—6, 17; iii. 1, 4; iv. 5, 6, 11; v. 2—4, 8, 14—16; vii. 2, 3, 6—10, 12; viii. 1—3, 8—10. Could any language be more alluring, more seductive, more passion-rousing, than the languid, uxorious, "linked sweetness long drawn out" of this Eastern marriage-ode? It is not vulgarly coarse and offensive as is so much of the Bible, but it is, according to the ruling of the Lord Chief Justice, a very obscene poem. One may add that, in addition to the allusions and descriptions that lie on the surface, there is a multitude of suggestions not so apparent, but which are thoroughly open to all who know anything of Eastern imagery.

After the Song of Solomon, it is a shock to come to the prophets; it is like plunging into cold water after being in a hothouse. Unfortunately, with the more bracing atmo-

sphere, we find the old brutality coming again to repel us, and coarse denunciation shocks us, as in Isaiah iii. 17. How would the Lord Chief Justice have dealt with Isaiah if he had lived in his day, and acted as is recorded in Isaiah xx., 2—4? He clearly would have put him in a lunatic asylum (Trial, p. 168). If it were not that there are so many worse passages, one might complain of the taste shown in the comparison of Isaiah xxvi. 17, 18; the same may be said of Isaiah xxxii. 11, 12. In Isaiah xxxvi. 12 we have a repetition of 2 Kings xviii. 27, which we could well have spared. In Isaiah lvii. 8, 9, we meet a favourite simile of the Jewish prophets, wherein God is compared to a husband, and the people to an unfaithful wife, and the relations between them are described with a minuteness which can only be fitly designated by the Solicitor-General's favourite word. Isaiah lxvi. 7—12 would be regarded as somewhat coarse in an ordinary book. The prophets get worse as they go on. Jeremiah i. 5 is the first verse we meet in Jeremiah which the Solicitor-General would take exception to. We next meet the simile of marriage, in Jeremiah ii., 20, iii. 1—3, 6—9, verse 9 being especially offensive. Jer. v. 7, 8, is coarse, as are also Jer. xi. 15 and xiii. 26, 27. Ought the girl's schools to read Jer. xx. 17, 18? But, perhaps, as Ezekiel is coming, it is hypercritical to object to Jeremiah. Lamentations i. 8, 9, is revolting, and verse 17 of the same chapter uses an extremely coarse simile. Ezekiel is the prophet who eat a little book and found it disagree with him: it seems a pity that he did not eat a large part of his own, and so prevent it from poisoning other people. What can be more disgusting than Ez. iv. 12—15? the whole chapter is absurd, but these verses are abominable. The prophet seems, like the drawers of the indictment against us, to take pleasure in piling up uncomfortable terms, as in Ez. vi. 9. We now come to a chapter that is obscene from beginning to end, and may, I think, almost claim the palm of foulness. Let any one read through Ez. xvi., marking especially verses 4—9, 15—17, 25, 26, 33, 34, 37, 39, and then think of the absurdity of prosecuting Knowlton for corrupting the morals of the young, who have this book of Ezekiel put into their hand. After this, Ez. xviii. 6, 11, and 15 seem quite chaste and delicate; and no one could object to Ez. xxii. 9—11. Ez. xxiii. is almost as bad as chapter xvi., especially verses 6—9, 14—21, 29, 41—44. Surely if any book be indictable for obscenity, the Bible should be the first to be prose-

cuted. I know of no other book in which is to be found such utterly unredeemed coarseness. The rest of Ezekiel is only bloodthirsty and brutal, so may, fortunately, be passed over without further comment. Daniel may be left unnoticed; and we now come to Hosea, a prophet whose morals were, to speak gently, peculiar. The "beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea," was the Lord's command as to his marriage, related in Hosea i. 2; we then hear of his children by the said wife in the remainder of the chapter, and in the next chapter we are told, Hosea ii. 2, that the woman is not his wife, and from verse 2—13 we have an extremely indecent speech of Hosea on the misdeeds of the unfortunate creature he married, wherein, verse 4, he complains of the very fact that God commanded in chap. i. 2. Hosea iii. 1—3 relates another indecent proceeding on Hosea's part, and his purchase of another mistress; whether girls' morals are improved by the contemplation of such divine commands, is a question that might fairly be urged on Lord Sandon before he next distributes Bibles to little children of both sexes. The said girls must surely, as they study Hosea iv. 10—18, wonder that God expresses his intention not to punish impurity in verse 14. It is impossible, in reading Hosea, to escape from the prevailing tone of obscenity; chaps. v. 3, 4, 7; vi. 9, 10; vii. 4; viii. 9; ix. 1, 10, 11, 14, 16; xii. 3; xiii. 13, every one of these has a thought in it that all must regard as coarse, and which comes distinctly within the ruling of the Lord Chief Justice as to obscenity; there is scarcely one chapter in Hosea that does not, with offensive reiteration, dwell on the coarsest form of wrongdoing of which women are capable. Joel iii. 3 is objectionable in a comparatively slight degree. Amos, although occasionally coarse, keeps clear of the gross obscenity of Hosea, as do also Obadiah and Jonah. Micah i. 7, 8, 11, would scarcely be passed by Sir Hardinge Giffard, nor would he approve Micah iv. 9, 10. Nahum iii. 4—6 is almost Hoseatic, and Habakkuk ii. 5, 16 runs it close. The remaining four prophets are sometimes coarse, but have nothing in them approaching the abominations of the others, and we close the Old Testament with a sigh of relief.

The New Testament has in it nothing at all approaching the obscenity of the Old, save two passages in Revelation. The story of Mary and Joseph is somewhat coarse, especially as told in Matt. i. 18—25. Rom. i. 24—27 is distinctly

obscene, and 1 Cor. v. 1, vi. 9, 15, 16, 18, would all be judged indelicate by Her Majesty's Solicitor-General, who objected to the warnings given by Knowlton against sexual sin. The whole of 1 Cor. vii. might be thought calculated to arouse the passions, but the rest of Paul's Epistles may pass, in spite of many coarse passages, such as 1 Thess. iv. 3—7. Heb. xiii. 4 and 2 Peter ii. 10—18 both come into the same category, but it is useless to delay on simple coarseness. Revelation slips into the old prophetic indecency; Rev. ii. 20—22 and xvii. 1—4 are almost worthy of Ezekiel.

Can anyone go through all these passages and have any doubt that the Bible—supposing it to be unprotected by statute—is indictable as an obscene book under the ruling of the Lord Chief Justice? It is idle to plead that the writers do not approve the evil deeds they chronicle, and that it is only in two or three cases that God appears to endorse the sin; no purity of motives on the writers' parts can be admitted in excuse (Trial, p. 257). These sensuous stories and obscene parables come directly under the censure of the Lord Chief Justice, and I invite our police authorities to show their sense of justice by prosecuting the people who circulate this indictable book, thereby doing all that in them lies to vitiate and corrupt the morals of the young. If they will not do this, in common decency they ought to drop the prosecution against us for selling the "Fruits of Philosophy."

The right way would be to prosecute none of these books. All that I have intended to do in drawing attention to the "obscene" passages in the Bible, is to show that to deal with the sexual relations with a good object—as is presumably that of the Bible—should not be an indictable misdemeanour. I do not urge that the Bible should be prosecuted: I do urge that it is indictable under the present ruling; and I plead, further, that this very fact shows how the present ruling is against the public weal. Nothing could be more unfortunate than to have a large crop of prosecutions against the standard writers of old times and of the present day, and yet this is what is likely to happen, unless some stop is put to the stupid and malicious prosecution against ourselves. With one voice, the press of the country—omitting the *Englishman*—has condemned the "foolish" verdict and the "vindictive" sentence. When that sentence is carried out, the real battle will begin, and the blame of



the loss and the trouble that will ensue must rest on those who started this prosecution, and on those who shield the hidden prosecutor. The Christians, at least, ought to join with us in reversing the ruling of the Lord Chief Justice, since their own sacred book is one of those most easily assailable. The purity that depends on ignorance is a fragile purity ; the chastity that depends on ignorance is a fragile chastity ; to buttress up ignorance with prison and fine is a fatal policy ; and I call on those who love freedom and desire knowledge, to join with us in over-ruling by statute the new judge-made law

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S TRACTS. No. 10.

THE  
FRUITS OF CHRISTIANITY

BY

ANNIE BESANT,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.



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# THE FRUITS OF CHRISTIANITY

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“BEWARE of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit ; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is [should be] hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them.” Such was the sensible test which Jesus of Nazareth is said (Matt. vii., 15-20) to have given to his followers, that they might apply it to those who pretended to a divine mission, and thus have an infallible criterion whereby they might discern the reality or falsehood of the claim. It cannot be unwise or unfair to apply to Christianity the test of Christ, and so discover whether or no it is a message from a good and loving God, designed for the regeneration of man.

History shall be our guide to pluck for us the fruits which are to prove the goodness or the badness of the tree planted, we are told, more than eighteen centuries ago.

Three hundred years after the supposed death of the alleged founder of Christianity, a candidate for the imperial throne was converted to the faith, and became, with Christian help, sole ruler of the Roman empire. He was the buttress of his new religion ; he was present at the Council of Nicæa, that settled the relative positions of the persons of the Christian Trinity ; he passed laws to put down Paganism ; he confiscated the property of heretics for the benefit of the orthodox ; he bought converts by the thousand with gold ; he poured wealth into the Church’s lap, and the treasurers of public money lavished it, by his command, on the Christian bishops ; all that a man and an emperor could do to strengthen a religion Constantine did for Christianity. The fruits it bore in him were clearly marked ; he put off his baptism till the close of his life, so

that he might sin in safety ; he murdered his son ; he murdered his wife ; he was a cruel tyrant as emperor, and a profligate as man.

During these centuries, down to the time of the Reformation, the Greek and Roman Churches are, practically, our only representatives of Christianity, and it is their fruits which we must gather.

Nor must the admirers of "primitive Christianity" think themselves unfairly used, or speak of these Churches as corruptors of the purity of earlier times. If the writings ascribed to Paul, Peter, and Jude be claimed as belonging to the first century, the morality of Christians must, even then, have been of a very dubious character. *See* such passages as 1 Cor. v. 1. In the second century, Mosheim complains that if a person who has "no clear and distinct ideas of virtue and vice" is "a bad guide in morals," then that "title belongs indisputably to many of the Fathers," and that Christians forged writings, and committed numerous pious frauds to advance their religion. In the third century, the same writer describes the "luxury and voluptuousness" of the Christian bishops, and the similar vices of the priesthood, while in the fourth, he says, sadly, that "the Church was contaminated with shoals of profligate Christians, and that the virtuous few were, in a manner, oppressed and overwhelmed with the superior numbers of the wicked and licentious." Christianity clearly did not succeed in inducing a high standard of public morality.

Indeed, even as early as the beginning of the fifth century, Salvian, a presbyter of Marseilles, draws a black picture of his co-religionists. "Who is there," he asks, "who is not rolling in the mire of fornication ? And what more ? What I am about to state is grave and mournful. The very Church of God, what does it but provoke him to anger ? With the exception of a very few, who fly from vice, what is almost every Christian congregation but a sink of vices ? For you will find in the church scarcely one who is not either a drunkard, or a glutton, or an adulterer, or a fornicator, or a ravisher, or a robber, or a manslayer, and, what is worse than all, almost all these without limit. I put it now to the consciences of all Christian people, whether it be not so that you will barely find one who is not addicted to some of the vices and crimes I have mentioned ; or, rather, who is it that is not guilty of all ? Truly, you will

more easily find the man who is guilty of all, than one who is guilty of none. . . . Into this shameful dissoluteness of manners is nearly the entire ecclesiastical mass so sunk, that, throughout the Christian community, it has come to be regarded as a species of sanctity if one is a little less, vicious than others." (Miall's "Memoirs of Early Christianity," pp. 366, 367).

Persecution is the bitter fruit which first attracts our notice. As soon as Christianity mounted the throne, penal laws against heretics were enacted. The first stake was raised in Spain, and the first burned heretic shows darkly red in the fourth century after Christ. All meetings of the unorthodox were proscribed by Theodosius (A.D. 380-394), buildings used for their meetings became forfeit to the Emperor, and heretics were declared incapable of making wills or of receiving any advantage from the wills of others (*see* Gibbon's "Decline and Fall," vol. iii., pp. 412, 413). Death and confiscation of property were the legal penalties of Paganism, even in those early days.

In the fifth century, Hypatia, the beautiful philosopher, was seized and pulled from her chariot as she drove towards her lecture-room, was dragged into the great church of Alexandria, stripped naked, struck down, and her body cut to pieces with oyster-shells, and then burned. Her crime was that she was drawing the youth of Alexandria back to the old Pagan gods, and the monks, the army of the Christian bishop Cyril, murdered her in obedience to God's command in Ex. xxii. 20. As time went on, and conversions came in but slowly, persecution was called more vigorously to the aid of the Christian cause. Mosheim relates how Charlemagne converted the Saxons by sending armies among them, doing with fire and sword what the bishops and monks had failed to do, because they made their effort "without the aid of violence or threats" (*see* Mosheim's "Ecclesiastical History," p. 170). In the following century the Saxons were sufficiently advanced to produce some heretics, and Godeschalcus, a monk, was flogged in a council of bishops, A.D. 849, until he burned his own writings.

The Eastern branch of the Christian tree was as stained by human blood as was the Western. In Armenia, by order of the Empress Theodora, 100,000 people belonging to the Paulician heresy were seized, their property confiscated, and they themselves tortured to death.

In the tenth century the Normans, Poles, Russians, Danes, and Norwegians, all embraced Christianity: the Normans, because conversion was the price demanded for a large cession of land; the Poles, because their Duke enforced penal laws against Paganism; the Danes, because conversion was imposed as a condition of peace after decisive defeat; the Norwegians, for the same reason.

The Crusades, whether against the Mahomedans or heretics, are all among the fruits of Christianity. Hallam, in his "Europe during the Middle Ages," draws the sad picture of the first crusade: "We should be warranted by contemporary writers in stating the loss of the Christians alone during this period at nearly a million; but at the least computation, it must have exceeded half that number" (p. 30). In 1099 Jerusalem was taken: a *Te Deum* resounded from the Holy City, and then the soldiers of Christ rose from their knees and went through the streets, slaying pitilessly men, women, and children. In the next century Bézières rivalled Jerusalem; it was a city of the Albigenses, and Pope Innocent III. had called for a crusade against the heretics, which "was prosecuted with every atrocious barbarity which superstition, the mother of crimes, could inspire. Languedoc, a country, for that age, flourishing and civilized, was laid waste by these desolators; her cities burned; her inhabitants swept away by fire and the sword;" in the storming of Bézières and the accompanying massacre, 60,000 persons perished, not one human being escaping. "Kill them all!" was the order given to the army; "kill them all! God will know his own" (Hallam, p. 25). These butchers carried out God's commands as recorded in Deut. xiii. 12-16. It is to this same Pope Innocent III. that we owe the establishment of the "Holy Inquisition," whose powers were committed into the hands of the Dominicans by Gregory IX. in 1223. It was only the fuller organization of the penal laws against heretics, dating from the time of Constantine. St. Peter Martyr seems to have the honour of introducing burning at the stake as the special punishment of heresy: since God would burn heretics in hell for ever, it was meet that his children should burn them on this side the grave.

In Spain the Holy Office worked hard; established by Ferdinand and Isabella, A.D. 1480, during the following year it burned nearly 3000 persons in the province of Andalusia alone, and otherwise punished another 17,000; 31,912 persons.

were burned alive by it in Spain during the 236 years of its fullest power; in addition to these it heavily punished 291,450 human beings. In one year 950 persons were burned alive in Ciudad Real. The last woman burned in Spain was an unfortunate creature accused of making a contract with the devil; she suffered at Seville, on November 7, 1781, only ninety-six years ago. In 1492, the Jews were driven out of Spain, under penalty of death if they returned; the Spanish clergy preached against them in the open squares; all help was denied them; they died like sheep as they struggled along the roads out of Spain. In 1502, the Moors were the victims; they, too, were driven out of the land of their birth, and no less than 3,000,000 harmless, peaceful citizens were thus exiled by Christianity.

In the Netherlands, Alva was a shining light of the Church; he was sent there to extirpate heresy, and right bloodily he worked at his task. He "boasted that, in the five or six years of his administration, he had put to death in cold blood more than 18,000 . . . . we know, from other sources, that in one year more than 8000 were either executed or burned" (Buckle's "History of Civilization," vol. ii. p. 451). The Prince of Orange estimated that, up to the year 1566, 50,000 persons had been put to death in obedience to the edicts (*See Ibid.*, note).

The massacre of St. Bartholomew is another fruit of the Christian tree. At Paris, Aug. 24, 1572, the Huguenots were suddenly attacked, and over 1400 persons were slain, the king, from his palace window, shooting at the flying fugitives. A church bell gave the signal for the massacre, and the cross was the sign of the murderers. Pope Gregory XIII. struck a medal to commemorate the event, and chanted a grand *Te Deum* of gratitude. France has many another blood-stained page to show. The *dragonnades*, under Louis XIV., give us some of the most piteous tales of Christian persecution. Soldiers were let loose on the Huguenot population with permission to do all save actually slay: "Afterwards they fall upon the Protestants (A.D. 1685); and there was no wickedness, though never so horrid, which they did not put in practice, that they might enforce them to change their religion. They bound them as criminals are when they be put to the rack; and in that posture, putting a funnel into their mouths, they poured wine down their throats till its fumes had deprived them of their reason and



they had in that condition made them consent to become Catholics. Some they stripped stark naked, and, after they had offered them a thousand indignities, they stuck them with pins from head to foot ; they cut them with pen-knives, tore them by the noses with red-hot pincers, and dragged them upon the rooms till they promised to become Roman Catholics, or till the doleful outcries of these poor tormented creatures, calling upon God for mercy, constrained them to let them go. In some places they tied fathers and husbands to the bed-posts, and ravished their wives and daughters before their eyes. . . . From others they pluck off the nails of their hands and toes, which must needs cause an intolerable pain. They burnt the feet of others ; they blew up men and women with bellows till they were ready to burst in pieces. If these horrid usages could not prevail upon them to violate their consciences and abandon their religion, they did then imprison them in close and noisome dungeons, in which they exercised all kinds of inhumanities upon them " (Quick's "Synodicon," as quoted in Buckle). Some of the barbarities related by Benoît are too horrible to translate : every foul outrage, especially on women, that a filthy imagination could suggest, was practised on these unhappy Protestants to attract them into the Roman Church.

Single names stand out brightly among the victims of Christianity. Ceccus Asculanus, a physician, was burned in A.D. 1337, at Florence, in consequence of some misunderstood mechanical experiments. John Huss was burned A.D. 1415, and his friend, Jerome, in 1416, for heresy. Savonarola, a monk, was tortured and burned in A.D. 1498, for trying to reform abuses. Giordano Bruno was burned at Rome, A.D. 1600, for scientific heresy ; and Vanini had his tongue torn out, and was burned at Toulouse, A.D. 1619, for philosophy and heresy.

Protestant Christianity began to persecute shortly after its birth. Servetus, heretic as to the Trinity, and Gruet, heretic as to Christianity as a whole, were both burned in Switzerland, at the instigation of Calvin ; and Gentilis, a Unitarian, was put to death at Berne, A.D. 1566. In England, the Reformation began by impartial burning of both sides, and the "Six Articles" were made the rule of faith. Soon after they were passed, 500 persons were in gaol, and Protestants and Catholics were tied back to back, and dragged to execution on the same hurdles. The Protestants got the upper hand under Edward VI., and a

commission was granted to Archbishop Cranmer—just then a Protestant—"to examine and search after all Anabaptists, heretics, or contemners of the book of Common Prayer." Joan Bocher and Van Paris were burned alive, and many others were hanged or beheaded. Under Mary; the Catholics had again a turn, and they then killed Protestants. About 277 persons were burned alive between 1555 and 1558, 55 of whom were women and 4 were children. Under Elizabeth, the Protestants triumphed, and Roman Catholics and Puritans both suffered at the hands of the now established Reformed Episcopal Church. A court of ecclesiastical commission was instituted, and fine and imprisonment fell on all nonconformists. Continued refusal to attend public worship was, in 1593, made punishable with death. Racking, hanging, ripping up, quartering, these were the weapons used to convert the English people to Protestantism. Lingard thus describes the rack: "A large open frame of oak, raised three feet from the ground. The prisoner was laid under it, on his back, on the floor. His wrists and ankles were attached by cords to two rollers at the ends of the frame: these were moved by levers in opposite directions till the body rose to a level with the frame. Questions were then put, and if the answers did not prove satisfactory, the sufferer was stretched more and more till the bones started from their sockets." This was the gentle method in which Protestants converted Catholics under Elizabeth. The last people burned alive in England for heresy were two men, named Legat and Whitman, who suffered A.D. 1611.

In Ireland, Protestantism showed itself worthy of the Christianity of which it was a branch. The penal laws against Catholics are among the most disgraceful pages of history.

When the English altered their creed, the Irish utterly refused to follow their conquerors in their change of religion, and clung with passionate devotion to the faith of their fathers. A fierce effort was made to compel conversion. All priests were expelled the realm under pain of hanging, drawing, and quartering; and to conceal a priest was death. A Papist who refused to attend the reformed public worship was fined, imprisoned, and forbidden, when set free, to go more than five miles away from his house. In 1694, Roman Catholics were forbidden to educate their children abroad; and in 1709, Papists were forbidden to teach either privately or publicly, so that Roman Catholic

children were left, perforce, without education. In 1703, it was enacted that any Papist child turning Protestant, should inherit all his father's property, to the exclusion of the rest of the family. No Papist might own land, nor have a lease of more than 31 years. If the heir of a Protestant were a Papist he was passed over, and the heritage went to the nearest Protestant relative. If a Papist cultivated his land so as to make a profit exceeding one-third of the rent, he forfeited the farm, and it was given to the Protestant who informed against him. A Papist was not allowed to own a horse worth more than £5, and a Protestant discovering him with a more valuable animal was rewarded by becoming its possessor, on the payment of the £5. These acts were only repealed in 1829, and then, not from regretful shame, but from fear of revolution.

In Scotland, Christianity bore the same fruits. The Cameronians were hunted down in every direction; their religious meetings were broken up by soldiers, and they were mercilessly cut down as they fled. Sharp, the Archbishop of St. Andrew's, instituted an ecclesiastical court, that banished its victims to the most unhealthy settlements. Soldiers were turned loose on the people, and the horrors of the *dragonnades* of Louis were repeated by the troops of Charles II. "The fairest parts of Western Scotland were devastated, houses burned, men tortured, women ravished. In 1670 an Act of Parliament was passed, declaring that whoever preached in the fields without permission should be put to death. Some lawyers were found bold enough to defend innocent men when they were tried for their lives. It was, therefore, determined to silence them also, and in 1674, a great part of the Faculty of Advocates was expelled from Edinburgh. In 1678, by the express command of Government, the Highlanders were brought down from their mountains, and, during three months, were encouraged to slay, plunder, and burn, at their pleasure, the inhabitants of the most populous and industrious parts of Scotland. Eight thousand armed Highlanders, invited by the English Government, and receiving beforehand an indemnity for every excess, were left to work their will upon the towns and villages of Western Scotland. They spared neither age nor sex. They deprived the people of their property; they even stripped them of their clothes, and sent them out naked to die in the fields. Upon many they inflicted the most horrible tortures. Children, torn

from their mothers, were foully abused ; while both mothers and daughters were subjected to a fate compared to which death would have been a joyful alternative " (Buckle, vol. iii., 144-146). In a note, Buckle quotes from Wodrow's "Church of Scotland : " A woman was "sentenced to be let down into a deep pit, under the house of the dean, full of toads and other vile creatures. Her shrieks thence were heard at a great distance." Two men "were bound together with cords, and hanged up by their thumbs to a tree, there to hang all night." A woman was seized and bound, and "they put lighted matches between her fingers for several hours. The torture and pain made her almost distracted ; she lost one of her hands, and in a few days died." Thus did Protestants treat Protestants in Scotland. On the other hand, Roman Catholics met with the same harsh treatment. The Scotch Parliament decreed death against them, as idolaters, it being a "religious obligation to execute them," and John Knox declared that "the people are bound in conscience to put to death the queen, along with all her priests."

In France, the Huguenots, in districts where they were strong, showed themselves active persecutors of the Roman Catholics. They attacked the Catholic processions, interrupted the funerals, and insulted the priests in La Rochelle ; they forbade the exercise of the Roman religion, and would not allow the Catholics the use of a single church. In 1619, they forbade all preaching, within the limits of Protestant towns, of any minister commissioned by a bishop, and forbade Protestants to intermarry with Roman Catholics, or to be present at any Catholic ceremony ; they seized the goods of the Catholic priests. (*See* Buckle, vol. ii. 56—62).

Protestant Christianity in America showed itself worthy of the root whence it sprang. The Quakers were imprisoned, and were flogged from village to village. The Blue Laws of Connecticut remain as a monument of Christian cruelty among those who had fled from England to obtain liberty of conscience for themselves.

These are but a few of the horrible persecutions which are among the most terrible of the fruits of Christianity, and these spring from trees which have their roots in Holy Writ, and which adorn every garden planted by the Lord.

But Christianity is not only cruel ; it also "loves darkness rather than light," because ignorance is the con-

dition of its authority. It has carried on a long crusade against knowledge, and has delayed, by many a long year, the onward march of the human race. In the earliest days, "not many wise men," "not many learned," were called; the "wisdom of this world" was despised by the new Christians, while, on the other hand, the wise and thoughtful among the Greeks and the Romans treated with contempt the superstition which spread almost exclusively among the ignorant and the enslaved barbarians. Of the second century Mosheim writes: "The number of learned men among the Christians, which was very small in the preceding century, grew considerably in this," but he complains that there was a party in the Church which "were for banishing all argumentation and philosophy from the limits of the Church," and that the defenders of Christianity were mostly "destitute of penetration, learning, order, application, and force." In the third century, the sciences had "lost all their vigour and all their lustre," while in the fourth, which saw some of the leading doctors of the Church, the controversial writings were "negligent of order in their compositions," "seldom define their terms, and pour out their pious, but incoherent ideas, in fortuitous combinations, just as they come uppermost." It was in vain that the emperors, inheriting the Pagan traditions, founded schools and colleges; misled by their Christianity, they placed them under the care of the bishops, and some of these being indolent, and others bitterly averse to "every sort of learning and superstition," it followed that "Greek literature was almost everywhere neglected," and "philosophy fared still worse than literature, for it was entirely banished from all the seminaries which were under the inspection and government of the ecclesiastical order." In the seventh century, "the bishops in general were so illiterate, that few of that body were capable of composing the discourses which they delivered to the people;" and it was not until the Arabians arose and revived learning, that any beams of knowledge broke through the thick black fog of Christianity. In the tenth century their knowledge began to filter into Europe, and Mahomedans taught Christian students the elements of Greek learning. So far had Christianity killed out the old astronomical science that for 1500 years Christianity produced no astronomer; and when Copernicus, on his deathbed, left his book to the world, Christianity hunted down those who dared to follow him. The book was

burned, its author being beyond reach of the flames; Galileo was forced to recant by the Inquisition. In Spain, the Moors being expelled, learning died away, Torquemada destroying Hebrew books wherever he could find them, and burning, at Salamanca, 6000 volumes of Oriental literature; 119 learned men were thrown into the dungeons of the Inquisition in Spain—not for teaching heresy, but for teaching science. In France, the Huguenots forbade the study of Greek and of chemistry, and allowed no book to be printed without the sanction of the Church. The Roman Church, in the same country, swept away all books that taught learning of any kind. Buffon, Darigand, and Garlon met with the same fate as Voltaire, Diderot, and Helvetius. Each new discovery in science was met with the cry of “heresy” or “materialism;” and every step science has made has been won against the fiercest opposition. To-day the hatred is as bitter, though less powerful. Huxley, Darwin, Clifford, Tyndall, Lyell—these men are the *bêtes noires* of Christianity, although public admiration shields them from the fate of their predecessors. All advances in education have been made against Christianity. Robert Owen set the example of infant schools, and the party of secular education forced the Education Act through Parliament in the teeth of Church opposition.

How Christianity has darkened the innocent brightness of the world is known to every student. Roman Catholic Christianity made a miserable life a holy life, but was content to leave it to the “religious” only: Protestant Christianity forced it on all alike. The Swiss Calvinists set the example of austerity, and the French Huguenots quickly followed. They forbade theatres, private theatricals, dancing, gay dresses, conjuring, puppet-shows, &c., making gloom synonymous with piety. In Scotland, the Protestants made the Sunday a misery: good Christians might not visit a friend, bathe, or shave, water vegetables, ride, walk, sit at the house-door. Holidays, amusements, festive gatherings, shows, games, all were unlawful. If people transgressed, they “became unruly sons of the Church, and were liable to be imprisoned, to be fined, or to be whipped, or to be branded with a hot iron, or to do penance before the whole congregation” (Buckle, vol. iii. p. 262). Buckle gives several pages to the manufactured “sins” of Protestant Christianity, and winds up by saying:—“Men in their daily actions, and in their very looks, became troubled,

melancholy, and ascetic. Their countenance soured, and was downcast. Not only their opinions, but their gait, their demeanour, their voice, their general aspect, were influenced by that deadly blight which nipped all that was genial and warm. . . . Thus it was that the national character of the Scotch was, in the seventeenth century, dwarfed and mutilated."

The limits of this brief tract will not permit me to gather more of the fruits of Christianity; but these suffice, at least, to afford some test of the tree which has borne them all. Black, bitter, and poisonous are these fruits; and I appeal to the words of Christ as a fair criticism of the religion from whence they have sprung—

"A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

"A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit."

# NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

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## OFFICES :

HALL OF SCIENCE, 142, OLD STREET, E.C

## PRESIDENT :

CHARLES BRADLAUGH, 10, Portland Place, Circus Road,  
St. John's Wood, N.W.

## SECRETARY :

ROBERT FORDER, 37, Taylor Street, Woolwich, S.E.

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## PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTS.

The National Secular Society has been formed to maintain the principles and rights of Freethought, and to direct their application to the Secular improvement of this life.

By the principle of Freethought is meant the exercise of the understanding upon relevant facts, and independently of penal or priestly intimidation.

By the rights of Freethought are meant the liberty of free criticism for the security of truth, and the liberty of free publicity for the extension of truth.

Secularism relates to the present existence of man, and to actions the issue of which can be tested by experience.

It declares that the promotion of human improvement and happiness is the highest duty, and that morality is to be tested by utility.

That, in order to promote effectually the improvement and happiness of mankind, every individual of the human family ought to be well placed and well instructed, and that all who are of a suitable age ought to be usefully employed for their own and the general good.

That human improvement and happiness cannot be effectually promoted without civil and religious liberty; and that, therefore, it is the duty of every individual to actively attack all barriers to equal freedom of thought and utterance for all, upon political, theological, and social subjects.

A Secularist is one who deduces his moral duties from considerations which pertain to this life, and who, practically recognising the above duties, devotes himself to the promotion of the general good.

The object of the National Secular Society is to dis-



seminate the above principles by every legitimate means in its power.

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Any person may, in the discretion of the Executive, be admitted a member of this Society, who shall sign a form of Declaration as follows:—

“I am desirous of joining the National Secular Society, in order to extend its principles; and I pledge myself to do my best, if admitted as a member, to co-operate with my fellow-members to attain the objects of this Association.”

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This Declaration, signed by the candidate, shall be transmitted to the Secretary, with one shilling for a quarters' subscription; and, if the Executive accept the candidate, a certificate of membership will be issued, the total subscription being four shillings per year. Persons unable to pay this subscription may be enrolled free on satisfying the Executive that they do good secular work. Affiliated Societies whose members join the National Secular Society shall only pay one-third of the above subscription.

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- 1. Address to Christians (1 p.).
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7. What is Secularism (2 pp.)?
8. Who are the Secularists (2 pp.)?
9. Secular Responsibility (2 pp.).
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# THE IDEA OF GOD

IN THE

## REVOLUTION.

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(By EMILE ACOLLAS. Tr. by ANNIE BESANT. Published in the *Droits de l'Homme*.)

ON the pedestal of the legislative monument which so brilliantly images the science and the political thought of the eighteenth century, the grandest which the French Revolution has raised for the human race, these words are to be seen :—

“Consequently, it (the French people) proclaims, IN THE PRESENCE OF THE SUPREME BEING, the following declaration of the rights of man and of citizenship.”

Why this invocation of the Supreme Being? Why do the authors of the constitution of '93 thus think proper to attest the existence of God in the forefront of their work? It is because this work is, before all things, that of the Montagnards, and the idea of God here appears in order to attest the Theism of Robespierre and of the Mountain.

Let us then examine the important question : what part has the God-idea played in the Revolution?

Robespierre and the Montagnards, disciples of the sentimental Rousseau, were Theists, like their master. The Girondins, on the contrary, were frankly Atheistic.

The Theism of Robespierre is a historical fact, well-known and easily proved. One day—on the occasion of the death of Leopold of Austria, and of certain advantages gained by the revolutionary forces—Robespierre, from the tribune of the Jacobin Club, gave an address, wherein he referred these events to Providence. Then spoke Guadet, the austere and the eloquent : “During this address I have heard a great deal about Providence, and I even think it was said that Providence had saved us spite of ourselves. I own, seeing no sense in this kind of language, that I never could have imagined that a man who, during three years, has toiled so bravely to rescue us from the slavery of despotism, could assist in replunging the French people into the slavery of superstition.” Robespierre remained silent ; he felt that his hour had not yet come.

But let us place ourselves in that time when the heroic Gironde has gone down beneath its own accumulated failures and its political moderation. We are at the 23rd of November, 1793; Robespierre is in the Government; Robespierre is King; listen to him, as he speaks in that same Jacobin Club, where he awhile ago remained speechless before the vehement apostrophe of Guadet. He has been striving to combat that Hebertism which was already beginning to emit furious and coarse diatribes against every conviction other than its own; he has been saying that there was a fanaticism other than the fanaticism of religion; and now he cries, suddenly, "The National Convention abhors Atheism;" and "it is not in vain that it has inscribed the name of the Supreme Being in the forefront of the declaration of rights." He declares that "Atheism is aristocratic," and he concludes by saying that "the French people are attached to the idea of an incomprehensible Power, terror of crime, and sustainer of virtue." Never, not even in times of most ardent faith, had any expressed himself in more mystical and more passionate language.

Here, then, in the Revolution, are two clearly defined views about God: that of the Girondins, who reject the idea of God, and that of the Montagnards, who accept this ancient pivot of the world.

Shall we admit the opinion of the Hebertists as a third view? but, what are the Hebertists? The Hebertists, with the exception of Chaumette, are a group of ignorant people; they are characterised by their violent polemics, and by their constant appeals to force; at the bottom, they have adopted the idea of the Girondins, but—far other than their masters—they proscribe opponents. It was not enough for them that the worship of Reason should be established—as though Reason could be worshipped in any other way than by making her the soul of our thoughts and the sovereign of our acts—they desired that each should bend the knee before their *Goddess*. Let us leave on one side, then, the Hebertists, for they do not represent any idea in the Revolution. (It is possible, nay probable, that the Hebertists have been much calumniated both in their public and private life; it is incontestable that they were consumed by a burning flame for the revolutionary cause; but it is no less true that the Hebertist tradition is bad, for it is that of a man who, in a puerilely vulgar and low style, addressed himself to vulgar and low passions. But we have too long disputed

over men ; let us be, for the future, neither Girondists, nor Montagnards, nor Maratists, nor Hebertists : let us be for all those who loved the Revolution, and who served her, and let us strive to become inspired with that which was best in each of them.) But, side by side with them, is a man, Anacharsis Clootz, who has been wrongly numbered in their ranks, and who cannot be passed over in silence, for he presents one of the most original types, and also one of the most admirable hearts, of the revolutionary epoch. He was a Prussian baron, the possessor of vast domains, and, learning the good news of the French Revolution, he had sold all he possessed, and come to invest his fortune in French *rentes*. While he was an enthusiastic partisan of the French Revolution, Clootz was also, I will not say a thinker, but a dreamer. Enthralled by the doctrines of Spinoza, he had mingled with them the sentimentality which was the essence of his ardent nature, and the result was a book as strange as the mind that conceived it: *The Universal Republic*, by the Friend of the Human Race.

Throughout this work one comes across such propositions as the following : "There is no other Eternal Being save the Universe. By adding an incomprehensible  $\Theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$  to an incomprehensible  $\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$  the difficulty becomes doubled without being resolved.—But every work implies a workman.—I deny that the universe is a work, and I affirm that it is eternal.—But it is so wonderful !—Your Creator is far more so, and you cannot explain one wonder by a greater."

These were words of gold, but there was more than this good sense in Clootz : one side of him was enveloped in fogs ; sometimes he will begin to talk about the soul of the world, and then amalgamating the profound and rectilinear reveries of Spinoza, the geometrician, with his own, he loses himself in the most fantastic conceptions. However we may regard him, Clootz, among the men of the Revolution, stands by himself as the representative of a special idea of God. This idea did not die with him, but has come down to our days, and a revolutionary mystic of the present time is really a disciple of the Clootz who was so illogically associated with Robespierre.

To sum up : we meet three ideas of God in the Revolution. That of Robespierre is the most backward, the most retrograde ; Robespierre is the witness for a personal God ; but, from a personal God to a God of providence, there is only a step, and this step Robespierre has taken ; he con-

fesses the providence of God in every event. But if God be a God of providence, among the means which he will use to govern the world, the one he will like best will be to raise up men whom he will inspire by his spirit, and whom he will invest with a mission. The theory of providential men is, therefore, we see, the necessary product of Theism. And Robespierre himself, what is he, in his own mind, if not a providential man? Let us listen to him, in fact, in his familiar outpourings, and we shall learn the secret of his conscience: "How often," he cries, "alone with my soul, have I had nought to sustain me, save the idea of God?"

Is it, in truth, a son of the eighteenth century, and of the French Revolution, who speaks thus? is it not, rather, some monk from a cell of the Middle Ages? Be not astonished, then, that Robespierre is the advocate of social tutelage; the providential man is the born guardian of those who are not providential. And as to the means which this man will take to secure his power, you may be ready for everything; for, when one is providential, there is no need to put oneself out about the human race, and it is quite simple to destroy those who oppose themselves to one's designs, which are the designs of God. Between the acts of Robespierre and those of the most sombre Inquisitors, I defy anyone to draw the smallest distinction. At the same time, I do not forget that this really great man belonged to the party of Justice, that he lived and died for her; yet I may blame certain ideas, I may reprove certain means.—In the end I reconcile myself to him, and know not, at last, how to do aught but venerate the illustrious shade of the vanquished of the 9th of Thermidor.

Now is the time to consider the idea which stands as a kind of intermediary between the position of scientific Atheism and the theory of a personal God—the idea of Spinoza and of Anacharsis Clootz, the idea of Pantheism.

Pantheism, whatever shape it may assume, is undeniably a doctrine which is far nearer to Atheism than to the idea of a personal God; in fact, it is an Atheism which surrounds its premisses with clouds, and hides from itself its real foundation.

Let us listen to the master; "God," writes Spinoza, "is a simple and infinite substance, whose two attributes are intelligence and extension, and of whom finite existences are only modes."

That appears to be marvellously clear, and there are,

indeed, in this definition, only four or five terms, which, in their turn, each require defining—substance, intelligence, extension, mode, and the term finite used in relation to the term infinite, as if the infinite could have finite modes, as if the infinite could admit of modes, or of any form of being save itself. A disappointing beginning! but let us advance further. Spinoza's God is not possessed of liberty; he creates and acts by virtue of a volition of which he is not master, and which he himself is the first to undergo. Then, it is this volition, if it exists, which is God. That which is thus God is not the God of Spinoza. But for us, who accept everlasting research as the destiny of man, this principle is the Unknown, the mighty Unknown of Nature, the grand substratum of existence; this is the prize which our thoughts ever pursue, but which, alas! they will never attain, the prize which retires as we advance, and which it is needless to call God in order to be less far off from it age after age. Do we want a further and peremptory refutation of Spinoza, given by a man who has carried it out to its consequences, by the greatest metaphysician that has ever lived? The Pantheist Hegel seeks to discover where the divine substance reaches its highest, and he writes: "God attains to self-consciousness in man."

And, truly, outside man, what other being that we know of possesses what we call consciousness? Consciousness, is it not the criterion of personality? How is it that I distinguish myself as an individual from among all other men, all other beings? It is because I am conscious of my existence in the present, and in a certain past. An unconscious God, what would he be? Assuredly he would not be a personal God, and by an invincible logic we are forced into this dilemma—either a personal God, or, speaking subjectively, no God at all.

We have now seen what this idea of God has been in the men of the Revolution. And, first, do not let us believe those—either superficial thinkers, or else rendered obtuse by the positivism of the day—who say that the idea of God is foreign to politics. On the contrary, this idea has been the spring which moved one of the greatest men of the French Revolution, and it has remained as a stumbling-block in the way of all the political theorists, who have not been able to relegate it to the domain of fabulous conceptions.

Of this, what more convincing proof could be given to

us than that afforded by the eminent writer who, in our own days, has made himself the panegyrist of Robespierre? M. Louis Blanc, in his "History of the French Revolution," has devoted a great number of pages to trace out the quarrels of the Girondins and the Montagnards over the idea of God, and he has taken part against the Girondins. Thus, he begins by severely blaming the attitude assumed by Guadet towards the God-idea, and he declares himself the champion of the Theism of Robespierre. Nevertheless, at the bottom, M. Louis Blanc is uneasy on his theological seat; for, if you turn over a few pages, you will find that the Theism of Robespierre was an *incomplete* idea (strange qualification!), that it is necessary to go as far as Spinoza; and the brilliant, but rather declamatory, writer, does not perceive that in going himself as far as Spinoza he runs the risk of being then carried, in spite of himself, to the idea of the Girondins. But if M. Louis Blanc is, in the end, unfaithful to the theology of Robespierre, and finally repudiates it, he has none the less Robespierre-fanaticism when the existence of God is in dispute. In that he remains by the side of his master. Thus, Robespierre has written: "Atheism is Aristocratic;" M. Louis Blanc would say, yet further: "Atheism is anarchical."

We, who think, like Robespierre and Louis Blanc, that the question of God rules all politics and all science, let us see:—

(1.) If Atheism is aristocratic.

(2.) If Atheism is anarchical.

First, is Atheism aristocratic? Robespierre declares it to be so, but he proves his thesis in strange fashion: "The rich," says he, "can do without the idea of God; but the poor needs to hope, needs to believe that the more he suffers in this world the more he will be recompensed in another." For my part, I conclude from these words that that which is aristocratic is not Atheism, but is Theism, is the doctrine of Robespierre, and I prove it thus: The poor, says Robespierre, has need to hope that he will be recompensed in another world; what matters, then, to him a time of trial which is but for a day in comparison with an eternal reward? What do I say? The poor should rather desire that the time of trial should be stern, hard, abominable; the more he is cast out from the hierarchy of society, the more he is oppressed and trampled down by tyranny, the more he should rejoice that it is so, for the weight

of the reward will be measured by the weight of the trial. We see the pure dogma of Catholicism and Monarchism; Robespierre had not succeeded in freeing himself from it.

Let us pass on to M. Louis Blanc: Is Atheism anarchical? Yes, doubtless, if by this word anarchical it is meant that the Atheists reject all authority which pretends to conceal its roots in the sky, and to hide its titles in the clouds; if it is meant that Atheists refuse submission to an authority which is only an empty phrase and a chimera; yes, then Atheism is essentially anarchical. But Atheism, that is to say, the idea that each man, before other men, is only to be ruled by his own consent, and should gradually tend more and more to self-rule, this idea, which is the pole of liberty, is also the pole of unity. (In a remarkable pamphlet, entitled, "The Idea of God, and its Signification in the Present," our friend, Dr. Louis Büchner, formulates three propositions, with which we agree so thoroughly, that we here reproduce them: "Theism, or the belief in a personal God, leads, as history proves irrefutably, to theocracy, monarchy, and priestly domination. Pantheism, or the belief that all is God, leads, where it is predominant, to the contempt of things sensible, to the negation of the individual, to the return into God, to stability, to immovability [without in any way contesting this judgment, we would add that, historically, Pantheism is a state of transition from Theism to Atheism]; Atheism, viz., the monistic philosophy, alone leads to liberty, to reason, to progress, to the knowledge of man and of human nature, in one word, to Humanism. It is this scientific Atheism, or this monistic philosophy, this Naturalism [we prefer this word to Humanism], which rallies round it to-day savants like Huxley, Clifford, Tyndall, and whose foundations were so well and authoritatively exposed by Professor Haeckel, of the University of Jena, in his admirable work on the natural creation (query evolution) of organised beings.") And for our part, have we not often enough repeated this demonstration, have we not often enough and amply enough proved that the right of liberty of one is united by a necessary link to the right of liberty of the other, or, more explicitly, that the conception of the right of each gives birth necessarily to that of the right of all, and of solidarity in right.

Let us leave aside, then, the sectaries and their anathemas. And if Robespierre and Louis Blanc are Republicans, let us do honour to their hearts more than to their reason, for



their metaphysical theories place them outside the Republican idea ; for Louis Blanc, like Robespierre, has professed the doctrine of providential men, and this doctrine, to whom has it been applied ? To the soldier who, on the 18th Brumaire, stabbed with one blow Liberty and France.

But let us return to the preamble of the declaration of rights, and realise the conclusion it requires. And this conclusion is that : It is dangerous, to say no more, to inscribe in a constitution affirmations or invocations that are not intended to have a legal sanction, and when one does so, one is an imprudent legislator ; when one does so, an hour comes wherein one is dragged beyond the premiss made, and wherein one pronounces, for instance, such a phrase as this : "The Convention abhors Atheism ;" when this hour comes the idea of proscription is already born, and proscription itself is not far off. When, then, the men of the Convention inscribed this second part of the preamble in their declaration, they did a thing utterly anti-revolutionary and anti-Republican ; "they were seized with the disease of kings," hatred of ideas (the great historian Michelet), and it was on that day that they, in reality, erected the scaffold of the Girondins, of Cloutz, and of Danton.

Until now, man has suffered under a great misfortune ; he has been unable to submit to be ignorant of that which he cannot know. Thus has fermented in him the corrupting leaven of faith ; thence are born all mysticisms, revealed religions, Theism, Pantheism ; also—a thing well worthy of remembrance—the more a man is ignorant of, the more he is obliged to fill up with his faith the deficiency of his science ; therefore, beware of mystics when a people is to be re-made, for if they are allowed free course, they will make it as unreasonable as themselves, and from the moment that the nations are bowed beneath the yoke which is the principle of all others, the only surprising thing would be if they were not ready to submit to all those others as well.

NOTE.—The views of Professor Emile Acollas are those of a large school of thinkers, and are deserving of the respectful study of English Radicals. We do not, of course, by translating his utterances, intend to endorse everyone of them, differences of thought on these subjects being inevitable on many points.